

A RIGHTEOUS
APOSTATE



LANZA



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*L. Aunt Alice Mink-She
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RIGHTEOUS APOSTATE

*Washington, April 28th
1884*

BY

(Hammond)
CLARA LANZA

AUTHOR OF "MR. PERKINS' DAUGHTER," ETC.

NEW YORK

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS

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Dedicate this Book

TO MY

MOTHER.

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A RIGHTEOUS APOSTATE.

CHAPTER I.

THE HÉRICOURTS.

“The Hottentots will neither reason nor think. ‘Thought,’ say they, ‘is the scourge of life.’ How many Hottentots are there among us!” — HELVETIUS.

IN the ancient city of Santa Fe, and in a room of a house occupied by the United-States Government as officers’ quarters, sat two ladies dressed in deep mourning. They were aunt and niece; but so different were they in features and general appearance, that no one unacquainted with the relationship would have supposed them to be members of the same family.

Miss Anastasia Héricourt, the elder of the two, was apparently about forty years of age. In reality she was fifty. As she possessed, however, that particular type of organization called the lymphatic, of which the three *f*’s, fair, fat, and forty, are so apt to be distinguishing characteristics, she passed for much more than she was worth in the matter of youth. She was of medium height, and rather inclined to *embonpoint*. Her face was by no means a plain one, but it was not altogether pleasant. This was not owing to any positively disagreeable feature or expression, but rather to the fact that every trait was decidedly negative in character. Her countenance, indeed, pre-

sented so marked an aspect of vacuity, that, had words of the most profound wisdom flowed from her lips, an acute observer would not have been impressed with a high sense of her mental qualities. We do not impute much intelligence to a parrot, even though he utter the proverbs of Solomon. Miss Héricourt in some respects resembled a parrot. Her face showed plainly that she preferred to rely upon others for judgment than to act for herself. It did not indicate absolute servility, but doubt and indecision were its prevailing influences. It was wanting also in those strong and positive points usually to be seen upon the faces of spinsters who have reached the age of fifty; and, indeed, the truth must be confessed, Miss Héricourt never thought for herself upon any subject if she could help doing so. She constantly sought advice, and was always ready to accord with the views of those who, from the force of circumstances or the assumption of authority, undertook to tell her what she was to do. When thus admonished, she would act in strict accordance with the counsel received, so far as her not very vigorous mind would permit her. If she had any emotions, she kept them well in the background; for they were rarely displayed. Not that she exercised any special self-control, but rather because they were hardly forcible enough to ripple the placid surface of pink-and-white skin beneath which her muscles of expression were supposed to lie. The black dress she wore, unrelieved even by a white collar and cuffs, caused her still excellent complexion to appear to advantage; and as she sat with her round, fat hands folded demurely in her lap, her lips slightly parted, and her expressionless, pale blue eyes gazing fixedly at vacancy, she reminded one more of a piece of Dresden china decorated outside the Royal Factory than of a flesh-and-blood woman.

Cordelia Héricourt, her niece, was as unlike her aunt in

every respect as it was possible to be. She was tall and slender; but there was nothing sharp or angular, either in her clear-cut features or well-rounded form. Perhaps her large gray eyes were a little too deeply set to be really beautiful; but this very fact gave a certain dignity and thoughtfulness to her face which nothing else, probably, could have supplied. They were eyes, not only capable of showing strong and deep emotion, but likewise all the delicate shades of feeling which ordinary eyes never display. There was, however, no trace of weakness in her face. She looked like one born to command and to be obeyed, — like one who thought seriously, even about trivial matters, and who, having determined what course to pursue, was not to be diverted from her purpose by either arguments or entreaties. All the firmness of her character was displayed in one feature, — her mouth. It was not a passionless mouth, with thin, compressed lips pale from their bloodlessness, but one with graceful curves and ample fulness, its every motion indicating strength and truth.

One might suppose at first sight that Cordelia was one who allowed her face always to be the index of her mind. It revealed her thoughts, however, only when she permitted it to do so; for she held her feelings well under control, to the extent of appearing sometimes cold and indifferent, perhaps cruel. She was just one and twenty, and consequently had not yet attained to her full intellectual and bodily development. But even now she understood how to suffer without complaint, how to endure with patience, and how to persevere with a tenacity of purpose which, though capable of being enlightened as she grew older, could never become more persistent.

Cordelia was not beautiful according to the conventional standard of beauty. She had too much individuality for that, and too little of the sentimental prettiness so pleas-

ing to commonplace minds. Intellectual people, however, would have been attracted by a face which expressed an infinitude of quiet power combined with an unbounded capability of showing both mental force and emotional activity. A man who loved her, and had sufficient strength of character to master her, would probably end by becoming her willing slave. With women generally she could never by any possibility be a favorite. Many of them would have hated her, still more would have feared her, all would have respected her, but few probably have loved her.

The two ladies sitting in that quaint Mexican room had been talking earnestly for more than an hour; and, to judge by the flush of excitement which had risen to Cordelia's face, the conversation was an important one. Even Miss Héricourt gave evidence of a slight degree of mental disturbance by an occasional sluggish movement of her eyes.

Before we listen to what they may further have to say, let us become somewhat better acquainted with the circumstances immediately surrounding them, and which are to exercise an overwhelming influence over their lives.

About seventy-five years before the opening of this story, René d'Héricourt, a young French officer of noble family, came to America on the staff of the Marquis de Lafayette. Being much pleased with the country, and, moreover, in love with a pretty Southern girl, he resolved to become naturalized as an American citizen; and, on the conclusion of peace between the Colonies and Great Britain, he bought an estate in Virginia, and settled down to the work of a planter. Shortly afterward he married Miss Betsy Faulkner, the daughter of a Virginia gentleman, a planter like himself, whose property adjoined his own. On the death of his father-in-law, a year later, Héricourt became, through his wife, the possessor of a landed

estate, which, with his own property, made him one of the wealthiest men in Virginia.

Two children were born to him, — a boy, whom he called René; and a girl, Anastasia. When Anastasia was two years of age her mother died; and Col. Héricourt, as he was called, decided to sell his American property, and return to France, for the purpose of educating his children, he said, but in reality because he longed to renew the associations of his youth, and enjoy an older and more luxurious civilization than that which prevailed on a tobacco plantation.

Land, crops, and slaves were accordingly sold; and with the proceeds in American gold, to the extent of over a hundred thousand dollars, Col. Héricourt set out for France. In the southern part of that country, near Avignon, lived his father and sisters, shorn, by the work of the French Revolution, of almost all their estate, except a few acres immediately surrounding their old château.

Little René at this time was nine years of age, and his sister Anastasia seven. It was in the year 1810, when France, under the First Napoleon, was at war with nearly the whole of Europe. On the very night that Col. Héricourt with his children and their old negro nurse arrived at the château, a large detachment of French troops, on their way to Spain, encamped scarcely half a mile from the house. Wandering parties of foragers visited the château; and Col. Héricourt, who had brought with him four stout oaken boxes containing his money, felt great apprehension for its safety. His whole mind was engrossed with this gold, which was to buy back the land that had been lost, and restore the estate of his ancestors to something approaching its ancient grandeur. He sat up till late that night watching the boxes. Outside he heard the sound of horses' hoofs and the clanging of sabres, accompanied now and then by a pistol-shot, as

squad after squad of troops passed by to and from the camp. Unable, finally, to obtain any thing like mental repose, he went out to the stable-yard behind the château, and, seizing a spade, hurriedly dug a deep hole in the earth. Then he returned to the house, and taking the boxes one by one, — for each weighed nearly a hundred pounds, — carried them to the excavation he had just made. The wind was blowing in mournful gusts, and the pale moonlight sought vainly at times to penetrate the heavy clouds overhead. The château, a dark, irregular mass in the distance, was surrounded by tall trees, which swayed to and fro with the gathering storm. Col. Héricourt, standing beside the mound of upturned earth, made a strange figure there. Now and then, as he placed the boxes in the deep hole, he stopped to listen; and once, thinking he heard a sudden faint footfall on the gravel-path near by, he started, and turned quickly aside into the shrubbery. But nothing came to disturb him; and, having replaced the earth and gravel over the buried chests, he went back to his room, and was soon sound asleep.

On the following morning, when his father's valet came to call him to breakfast, Col. Héricourt did not reply to the gentle knock at the door. The man entered, and found him still in bed, lying with his face upturned, and both hands folded across his breast. He tried to rouse him, but failed; and, when help was summoned, it was discovered that he was dead. An apoplectic fit, the old French doctor declared, had seized Col. Héricourt during the night, and quietly extinguished his life.

Of course, search was made for the missing money, which Baron Héricourt knew his son had brought with him; but it was never found. In his haste and fatigue that night, Col. Héricourt had neglected to close the doors when he returned to the house; and it was supposed from this, that robbers had entered the room while its

occupant was asleep, or in the stupor incidental to his attack, and had carried off the boxes of gold. Such scoundrels are always to be found on the outskirts of every large army.

The two children, thus left to the charge of their grandfather and two maiden aunts, found their prospects in life materially altered; for the old baron had barely enough income to maintain himself and his daughters in the humble way which poverty forced upon him. René and Anastasia were, therefore, not sent to school, but remained at home, to be educated by Mademoiselle Clotilde, the older of the two aunts, who had a studious mind, and considered herself quite capable of bringing the children up in a way befitting two scions of the *ancienne noblesse*.

But, when five or six years of this kind of life had passed uneventfully, a letter which created much excitement was received at the château. It was from Mr. Madison, then President of the United States, who had been an old friend of Col. Héricourt's; and it contained the offer to appoint René to a cadetship at West Point. This proposal was too advantageous to be declined; so young Héricourt returned to the United States, and in due course of time became an officer in the American army. Eventually he married, but his wife died shortly after the birth of a daughter; so he begged his sister Anastasia, who was still single, to make her home permanently with him, and become the guardian of his child. Miss Héricourt hesitated for a long time, being reluctant to undertake the journey, and to assume so grave a responsibility; but finally she acceded to her brother's request.

When the Mexican war broke out René was a captain. At its close he was a major; and, shortly before the opening of this story, he had been ordered to New Mexico in command of the fort at Santa Fe.

While making an attack upon a large force of Navajo

Indians, he was severely wounded, and brought back to Santa Fe. Recovery, however, was out of the question; and he died on the very morning that a package of papers arrived for him from France. It remained unopened for several days after his burial. Then his daughter Cordelia broke the seal with trembling hands. It was of the information contained in this packet that the two ladies were talking when introduced to the reader.

Two other ladies were at this time inmates of the house. These were Mrs. Aldergrove—a cousin of the major's on his mother's side—and her daughter Margaret. There was a remarkable circumstance connected with them. Mrs. Aldergrove in personal appearance was almost the exact image of Miss Héricourt, while Margaret equally resembled Cordelia. In neither case did the similarity extend beyond face and figure. In character they were very different, although even here there were one or two striking analogies. Mrs. Aldergrove was weak and rather pliable. Margaret was strong and wilful, keeping her mother well under control. But while the Héricourts were devout, even bigoted, Roman Catholics, the Aldergroves were fully as firm and zealous Protestants.

Major Héricourt had often commented with wonder upon the physical characteristics of his daughter and sister being so exactly duplicated in the persons of his cousins, and he had studied the subject in all its scientific and ancestral relations. Inquiry and search had resulted in the finding of an ivory miniature of Miss Betsy Faulkner's grandmother, taken when she was eighteen years of age; and the resemblance borne to it by both Cordelia and Margaret was indeed very striking. The likeness, therefore, was only an instance of the atavism, at that time comparatively unknown, to which the attention of scientists has of late years been so markedly directed. As for Miss Héricourt and Mrs. Aldergrove, no reason for the simi-

larity between them could ever be discovered. Major Héricourt thought the prototype existed far back in some early stage of the family. It was more probable, that the circumstance was one of those inexplicable coincidences, apparently accidental, in which Nature so often indulges.

The Aldergroves had been members of the major's family for a few weeks only. He had invited them to stay for a year in Santa Fe, with the expectation that the altitude of the place and the rarity and purity of the air would be beneficial to Margaret, whose lungs were considered weak. Previously to this visit, neither Miss Héricourt nor Cordelia had met them; and up to the present time no warm degree of affection had sprung up between the two couples.

CHAPTER II.

THE LOST MONEY.

"De l'argent, de l'argent, toujours de l'argent."

"My dear Cordelia," Miss Héricourt was saying with her slight French accent, "I am so astonished at what you have told me, that I cannot understand the half of it. Indeed, I am hardly sure that I have any of it right. My mind is so upset with the dreadful events of the past two weeks, that I am sure you will pardon me if I ask you to repeat the principal points of the story you have just related. To think that the packet should have remained unopened all this time!"

There was a look of weariness on Cordelia's face, but she patiently began for the third time to narrate the facts which had apparently so disturbed her aunt's mental equilibrium. "You know," she said, "that my grandfather was supposed to have been robbed on the night of his death."

"Yes," said Miss Héricourt calmly. "It is now over forty years ago."

"Well," Cordelia continued, referring to the papers which lay upon the table, "it seems that he was not robbed after all."

"Not robbed! Oh, yes! so you were telling me," said Miss Héricourt, a perplexed expression crossing her face. "Has all the money been found?"

"Yes, just where he left it, buried in the ground near the château."

"Tell me about it again," said Miss Héricourt, "for I have forgotten already. Some workmen, I think you said"—

"At my great-grandfather's death, the château went to his two daughters," said Cordelia.

"My dear aunts!" exclaimed Miss Héricourt, raising her eyes to the ceiling. "How much I am indebted to them for their fostering care!"

"If you will please not to interrupt me, aunt, I shall be able to get through sooner, and you will better understand the whole history."

"True," said Miss Héricourt. She opened her eyes a little wider, and fixed them upon her niece.

"My father," continued Cordelia, "renounced his interest in the estate in favor of his aunts; and they willed it away to a distant cousin, whose name I have never even known until now. His son is the present owner, and, being wealthy, wished not long ago to make extensive additions to the château. One day, in company with his architect, he was observing the work of some laborers who were digging the foundation for a new building to be erected. Suddenly the men came upon four oaken chests buried in the ground. They were marked with my grandfather's name. Monsieur d'Héricourt knew of the story which existed in the family in regard to the stolen money, and he at once suspected that these boxes contained the hundred thousand dollars belonging to my grandfather. Upon opening them, they were indeed found to be filled with American gold; and papers were there besides, which proved beyond a doubt that the treasure was the long-lost money."

"He might have said nothing about it, and have kept the whole, if he had so chosen," said Miss Héricourt musingly, forgetting the injunction laid upon her.

"He is a Héricourt and a gentleman," said Cordelia, flushing. "Consequently he could have done nothing of the kind."

"Of course not," said Miss Héricourt with confused haste. "I forgot for the moment that he was a Héricourt."

"He therefore wrote at once to my father," Cordelia went on, recovering herself, "and informed him of the facts, stating his readiness to make over the entire sum to you and him, who are the rightful heirs. My poor father's death has, of course, devolved his rights upon me; so that you and I are now the owners of it all."

Miss Héricourt rolled her eyes a little at this intelligence, but made no comment.

"He says in his letter," Cordelia continued, "that some formalities will have to be complied with, and that the heirs will be obliged to appear in person, to establish their identity."

"What! go to France?" cried Miss Héricourt with momentary animation. "Oh, that is impossible! Nothing would induce me to cross the ocean again. Let me give up my claim at once. You go, Cordelia, and take it all, my share as well as yours. I do not want the money. Say, if you like, that I am dead. Get it: and, as for me, you will care for me while I live; and my share would be yours in any event at my death, which I fear is not very far off."

There was a little pathos in her thin voice as she uttered the last words.

"Listen to me, aunt Anastasia, and I will tell you what I have resolved to do," said Cordelia quietly. "If you can agree with me, we shall both be happy during our lives, and sure of a blissful eternity hereafter. Before I knew of the existence of this packet," she continued after a pause, "I had intended to enter the convent of Our Lady of Guadalupe, and there devote my remaining years to the service

of the Church, by helping to educate the poor, ignorant girls in this wretched country. The idea of possessing this wealth has not deterred me in the least from my purpose. On the contrary, it has strengthened my desire, and will enable me to do more than I ever dreamed of being permitted to accomplish. I now see my way clearly, and yours too, aunt. Let us be of some use to our holy religion. Let us take this money, and devote it to Christ and his service. Why should we not found a religious order for women,—women who will give their lives to works of charity and faith, and who will help to lift our Church from the degradation into which it has fallen among these uncultivated people? Here in Santa Fe we will build our home, and here we will live and die.”

While speaking, Cordelia had risen from her seat to pace the floor excitedly. It was late in the afternoon; and the sun, on the point of setting, streamed in through the small, irregular windows, turning the quaint mahogany furniture upholstered in old Spanish leather into almost brilliant magnificence. One ray of quivering crimson light fell upon the girl's plain black dress. Her face glowed with suppressed feeling, while a keen animation sparkled in her deep gray eyes. Miss Héricourt seemed for a moment to be dumb with amazement; but suddenly her features relaxed, and she clasped her hands.

“It will be a glorious life, Cordelia,” she said, without a trace of agitation. “Of course, I will do just as you wish. Perhaps, however, it may not be necessary for us to go to France.”

“Yes, we must go to France if we desire to get the money. There can be no escape from that, I fear,” said Cordelia, resuming her seat. “I have looked the papers carefully over, and it is really essential that we appear in person to claim what belongs to us. I shall write by the mail that goes to-morrow morning. I shall also send our

photographs, and descriptions of our persons signed by the bishop, so that our cousin may have no difficulty in recognizing us when we meet. Then, in two weeks we will leave Santa Fe. It will take us about three months to make the journey and return."

"I suppose it must be as you say. You always know what is best, Cordelia. But I wish this journey could be avoided. I am wretchedly sick when at sea, and travelling across the plains is so tedious and fatiguing."

"Yes; but it is evidently our duty to go, nevertheless," replied Cordelia, with determination. "And I know you will try to endure any trial to which you may be subjected. Remember what we are about to do for Christ and his Holy Church. Help me to carry this great undertaking to a successful end. God sent this fortune to us when trouble had prepared our hearts to prompt us to its proper use. Now we can kiss the hand which dealt us the blow."

"Yes, I know," said Miss Héricourt feebly.

"I feel so tired, though," said Cordelia, rising presently, "and my head is so confused by all this, that I hardly know where to begin. At all events, I must see Padre Lamont to-night, and tell him what has happened. How delighted he will be to know that at last his ideas are to be actually carried out! I am going to my own room, aunt; and Jose shall take a note at once to Padre Lamont's lodgings. Do you not think an appointment for eight o'clock this evening will suit him?"

"Oh, yes!" said Miss Héricourt. "I should say eight o'clock, by all means."

CHAPTER III.

POOR RELATIONS.

“Der Hass ist ein actives Missvergnügen, der Neid ein passives; deshalb darf man sich nicht wundern wenn der Neid so schnell in Hass übergeht.” — GOETHE.

JUST after Cordelia had left the room, the door was gently opened, and a lady appeared upon the threshold. She was about to withdraw on seeing Miss Héricourt apparently sound asleep; but the latter, who was as wide awake as her sluggish circulation and semi-congested brain would permit, called to her in a faint voice, —

“Did you say, Cordelia, that *all* the money had been found?”

A sudden change came over the other's face. She entered softly, and closed the door.

“My dear cousin,” she said, “I am not Cordelia; and I do not know what you mean. There is nothing of which I possess less practical knowledge than money.”

“Oh! it is Margaret, of course,” said Miss Héricourt, raising herself in her chair to catch a better view of the new-comer. “The light is dim; and besides, I was not looking at you. But you and Cordelia are more alike now than ever, for you are both dressed in black. Do you not think one of you ought to wear some distinguishing badge, — a white collar, for instance, or a jet brooch? It was only yesterday that Capt. Fullerton spoke to you for Cordelia, while Lieut. Williams ad-

dressed your cousin as Miss Aldergrove. It is exceedingly embarrassing."

Margaret smiled. "Neither fact is very remarkable," she said, "when we consider that Capt. Fullerton is unable to see any thing unless it be twenty feet off; while Lieut. Williams's power of vision does not extend beyond the tip of his nose. I doubt even if he can see the end of that feature at all, as it is very long."

"You do not seem to like Mr. Williams," said Miss Héricourt stiffly. "I regret it. My brother and I hoped you might marry him."

"I marry Mr. Williams!" exclaimed Margaret disdainfully. "The mere fact that he is a Roman Catholic would prevent my doing so, even were there no other reasons."

"We are Roman Catholics," said Miss Héricourt, laying a slight emphasis on the pronoun.

"Yes, I know. But I have no intention of marrying you or Cordelia," Margaret answered carelessly. "However, let us change the subject. You were speaking of my resemblance to my cousin. I have discovered one point of difference between us. Look at the back of my neck." She knelt before Miss Héricourt, and bent her head. "I have a little brown freckle there close to my hair; while Cordelia has no such blemish, or beauty, whichever it may be. Mother discovered it a few days ago. Do you see it?"

Miss Héricourt looked attentively at the spot indicated. "Yes, I see it, of course," she said, after several seconds of reflection. "How strange that no other difference should exist between you and Cordelia! Only a tiny speck! It is very remarkable."

Margaret rose to her feet. She was indeed strikingly like her cousin. There were the same hair and eyes, the same full lips and rounded chin, the same contour of the face, the same tall, slender figure. It was a wonderful

resemblance, having in it something unnatural. And yet, when the two girls stood side by side, slight differences could be observed, not in the features themselves perhaps, so much as in their expression. When at rest, it required minute inspection to discover any dissimilarity between them ; and, even when found, it was difficult to say precisely what constituted it. But, when in action, they were seen at times to be quite unlike. The points of variation were especially noticeable in the movements of the mouth and eyelids. Margaret had a habit of partly closing her eyes whenever she talked earnestly. Cordelia was entirely exempt from this mannerism. She always looked straight into the face of the person with whom she spoke. She also opened her lips unreservedly, allowing her white and regular teeth to come into view. Margaret, on the other hand, kept her mouth as tightly closed as was consistent with distinct articulation ; and sometimes a few words would be uttered with an unpleasant sound, as though she spoke with malice, or intense feeling of another kind. As she stood before Miss Héricourt, with her features in complete repose, no one unfamiliar with the facial characteristics of the two cousins could have told whether she was Margaret Aldergrove or Cordelia Héricourt.

“What did you mean,” she asked after a short silence, turning to her cousin, “by asking me about money when you mistook me for Cordelia?”

“Oh, nothing !” Miss Héricourt replied evasively.

“Hardly nothing,” Margaret persisted. “You may as well tell me while we are alone,” she added.

“I think I promised particularly not to mention it,” said Miss Héricourt uneasily. “Cordelia has reasons of her own, I suppose. However,” she continued presently, noting the determined glance in Margaret’s eyes, “I cannot see why you should not be told. And, indeed, now that I reflect, I am not sure that I made any promise at all.”

"Tell me, then," said Margaret imperatively.

She knew the weakness of Miss Héricourt's character, and was perfectly aware that a command delivered in an authoritative tone would cause the recollection of previous orders to vanish like smoke. In this instance her foresight was certainly correct; for in a few moments Miss Héricourt had related the story of the lost money from beginning to end, as well as she could remember it.

Margaret took in each word with intense eagerness; and, when finally it dawned upon her that her cousins had suddenly become possessed of a large sum of money, a feeling composed of envy and avarice in about equal portions arose within her, and almost choked her. She hated them for their good fortune. Hitherto she had pretended to have some regard for them, for she well knew where her interests lay. But in her heart she disliked her cousins with an intensity which they did not in the least suspect. But she liked them better poor than rich, — better miserable than happy. She particularly detested Cordelia, whose calm, authoritative demeanor, which nothing apparently could discompose, angered her almost beyond endurance.

Poverty had always been her portion. Ever since she could recollect, she had been dependent upon somebody for the food she ate and the clothes she wore. Staring her in the face, night and day, was the hideous vision of continual privation, which, in addition to its grim presence, seemed to mock at her vain efforts to baffle it. And now these two women, who had never known the pangs of want in any sense of the word, had had wealth forcibly thrust upon them. The thought was bitter and horrible to her. As she sat there in the gathering twilight beside her cousin, her long, slender fingers twisted themselves together with suppressed rage, and she seemed to stifle for want of air.

But apart from the personal view of the matter, her

emotion had another basis upon which to rest. Margaret loved money, — loved it more for its own sake than for what it would give her. She was naturally a miser, and her life hitherto had caused the innate tendency to be developed into a growth of immense proportions. It has been asserted that avarice is a passion appertaining to weak minds, and rarely, if ever, to be met with in the young. Margaret Aldergrove was an emphatic denial of both these dogmas. She wanted money, — money to keep, to look at, to gloat over. She longed to feel, that in its possession she could not only gratify all her desires, but command likewise a portion of the great power that moves the world, and before which the wise and the foolish, the strong and the weak, the learned and the ignorant, the righteous and the wicked, with few exceptions, bend the knee in abject worship.

Margaret considered herself religious. She went regularly to church, said her prayers night and morning, and was ever ready to reprove evil in others by holding up to their contemplation the cheerful prospect of eternal punishment. She spent much time in trying to persuade the Deity that he had no more consistent and devout worshipper than herself. She possessed that self-gratulation, and firm consciousness of mental and moral perfectibility, which the doctrine of predestination is so well calculated to call forth; and finally, she deceived herself into the belief that her election had been pre-ordained from the very foundation of the world.

In telling her story, Miss Héricourt had neglected to state that she and Cordelia had determined to give their newly acquired wealth to the Church. The omission probably resulted from the fact that she had forgotten this arrangement for the time being.

“Of course,” said Margaret at last, rousing herself from the abstraction into which she had fallen, “I must tell

mother of this change in your prospects ; for it will, doubtless, lead to some alteration in our own plans. Here she is now," she added, as the door opened to admit another lady. "We can tell her together."

The new-comer walked across the floor with that undulating motion which is habitual with some women, and stood for a moment as if in doubt which of the others she would address first. In face and figure she was marvelously like Miss Héricourt ; but there was far more intelligence in her countenance than her cousin could have exhibited, even in her best days. Mrs. Aldergrove's expression however, was not much more agreeable than Miss Héricourt's. While the latter's was unsatisfactory from its passivity and negativeness, the former's was suggestive of a certain ability for working mischief. It was not, perhaps, more to be dreaded, — for the capability of a well-intentioned fool for ill-doing is practically unlimited, — but one especially to be watched with apprehension and caution. Generally speaking, we are prepared for the tricks of the wicked ; but who can tell where, or in what shape, the vagaries of the imbecile will be displayed ? Their very unexpectedness constitutes their chief danger.

A practical physiognomist, on looking at Mrs. Aldergrove, would have said that she was not a person to be particularly troubled with scruples when she had an object in view. At the same time, her mind was any thing but original. It was utterly wanting in resources, and habituated long since to being controlled by her daughter, the little self-assertion with which she had been endowed gradually became extinguished. Of course, Margaret carried off the palm so far as superior mental force in surmounting obstacles was concerned ; but what is a vigorous commander unless the troops at his disposal are able and willing to execute his orders faithfully ?

This was the relation existing between mother and

daughter. Each knew her place, and each was satisfied with the position. They had worked together for years with almost unvarying success; and, when they failed, it was owing to no fault of theirs, but simply because the impediments were of such a character as to render their removal impossible. There were no compunctions in either of them. By concerted action they had hitherto been able to keep themselves comfortable and respectable without offending their fine sense of the fitness of things by working for their living, — that is, working in the ordinary sense of the word; for so far as scheming, contest, subterfuge, deceit, and hypocrisy went, they had been as active as the most energetic worker in his ceaseless struggle for existence ever is. As a natural consequence, their wits were pared down, so to speak, to a degree of acuteness not to be despised by the most experienced knave modern life is capable of producing. Not the least result of their peculiar qualifications was the fact, that they had successfully imposed upon all with whom they had come in contact, and in addition, bore reputations for godliness and virtue which any saint in the calendar might have envied.

Mrs. Aldergrove listened to the recital of Miss Héricourt's story without showing any surprise, and at its conclusion was enthusiastic in the expression of her pleasure at her cousins' good fortune. She was a politic woman, — more so, perhaps, than Margaret; for she had far less independence of character, and could often discharge tasks requiring a degree of tact and prudence which her daughter could not exercise without doing more violence to her feelings than was precisely agreeable.

"It is a perfect summer evening, and I am going for a walk. Will you come with me?" she said to Margaret gently. "The exercise will do you good."

"Very well," answered Margaret, rising from her chair. She took her mother's arm, and they advanced together

toward the door. "I want to get out into the air," she said, in so low a tone that it escaped Miss Héricourt's ear. "I want to think with a cool head. Something must be done now and quickly."

CHAPTER IV.

PADRE LAMONT.

“Je vous le dis en vérité, celui qui aime, son cœur est un paradis sur la terre. Il a Dieu en soi, car Dieu est amour.” — LAMENNAIS.

THE house in Santa Fe occupied by the Héricourts was, like the better class of private residences in New Mexico, constructed so as to enclose a square court-yard, or *patio* as it is called. It was built of sun-dried bricks, or *adobes*, and was but one story high. But as each of its four external walls was a hundred feet long, and the distance between them and the inside walls twenty-five feet or more, it contained quite a number of spacious rooms, every one of which opened upon a broad veranda surrounding the *patio*. There was but one entrance to the house, and that was by a passage wide enough to admit two carriages abreast. Large doors, thickly studded with big-headed iron spikes, made the building, when they were closed, as strong as a fortress, and able to resist any attack that might be made by Indians or other marauders belonging to the rather lawless region. In one of these doors was a smaller one, which was used by persons wishing to enter after the large *portals* had been shut, which they were promptly at sunset every evening. In front of the house paced a sentinel, kept there by the courtesy of the officer who succeeded to the command at Major Héricourt's death. It was from a like consideration that Cordelia and her aunt were allowed

to remain in quarters to which they had no longer any legal right.

Precisely at eight o'clock on the evening following the opening of this story, Padre Lamont, who was well known to the soldier on post, as indeed he was to the whole garrison, rang the bell, and on being admitted through the small door, entered the room which served as parlor, and sat down to await Cordelia.

The apartment was large, and rather sparsely furnished. A single lamp standing upon a table in one corner gave forth just that amount of light which religious women and ecclesiastics like, — a light dim enough to prevent every little expression of the face from being seen, and tending to arouse that mysterious association between darkness and devotional feeling said to exist in the hearts of all delicately organized persons.

Padre Lamont wore the long cassock almost touching the ground, such as most of the Mexican clergy adopted. He was of French descent, although by birth an American, and had arrived in Santa Fe but a short time before the Héricourts, being in the *suite* of the excellent prelate appointed by the Church to take the spiritual charge of the recently erected New-Mexican diocese. Before that period the country, under the old *régime*, had been subject to the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Durango; and its state had been a by-word and a reproach to all enlightened members of the Roman Church. The change from the New-Mexican to the American hierarchy had produced striking results, even in the course of a month or two. The lazy, ignorant, and degraded Mexican priests had been, for the most part, gotten rid of in some miraculous way; and the proofs of recent elimination were still apparent. French, Irish, and American priests had taken their places, to the advantage of the Church and the people; though many of the latter, in their low, corrupt con-

dition, failed to appreciate the transformation which was being wrought. Schools were established, some gross superstitions finally removed; and the holidays, which were mere excuses for extraordinary indolence and dissipation, were greatly reduced in number. Progress, in short, was evident in all directions.

Paul Lamont was one of the most advanced and enlightened of the new-comers, and after some deliberation the Héricourts had selected him for their confessor and intimate friend.

He was scarcely thirty-five years of age. His figure was tall and imposing, and his face remarkably handsome. In addition to these attractions he possessed brilliant conversational powers, which he liked to display to listeners in sympathy with himself. Though a devoted member of the Roman-Catholic Church, it had been observed by many, that he rarely spoke of religion unless required to do so. To mixed audiences he was generally but little communicative; and were it not for his dress, and a certain gravity of expression which all priests are prone to exhibit, no one would have suspected his calling.

In the American society of Santa Fe, composed as it was of army officers, government officials, and the better class of traders, who were generally Protestants if any thing at all, Padre Lamont was held in high esteem. This was mainly owing to the fact, that there was more enlightened humanity and less bigoted intolerance shown by him than by his sluggish Episcopalian brother in the garrison, or the Freewill Baptist clergyman, who divided his time between horse-racing on week-days and soul-saving on Sundays.

His keen and well-developed æsthetic sense naturally caused him to admire the grandeur, dignity, and power of the Roman-Catholic Church. It was, therefore, a great source of regret to him, that none of these things was

exhibited in the church as it existed in Sante Fe. Instead of a cathedral of carved stone, ornamented with graceful, lofty spires, and planned with the distinct object of leading one's thoughts to the contemplation of those holy persons and things held in honor by the Roman faith, there was only an insignificant edifice composed of four *adobe* walls, surmounted by a mud roof, and a misshapen cupola of the same material. This structure had no pretension to interior decoration beyond the presence of some dusty pots of faded artificial flowers on the altar, and half a dozen fantastically dressed dolls, which, by a powerful effort of the imagination, were supposed to represent the Virgin Mary, the other members of the Holy Family, and certain domestic saints of whom the world at large knows nothing. There were, to be sure, in a remote and obscure corner of the church, three old Spanish paintings of value, so Padre Lamont declared; but they had never, up to this time, been considered of sufficient importance to be hung where the worshippers could see them. As for music, there was not even a small organ; and whoever has heard the average New-Mexican sing, would scarcely wish to have the experience repeated.

It has been said that Padre Lamont was very handsome. His head was large, and well poised upon his broad shoulders. His face was rather full; and his florid complexion pointed to robust health, indicating, perhaps, at the same time, a liking for the pleasures of the table. And, indeed, no one enjoyed a good dinner and a glass of fine Burgundy more than he. There was nothing of the ascetic about him; and but for the thoughtfulness of his large dark eyes, and the unmistakable firmness expressed by his mouth and chin, he would have been looked upon by many people merely as a courteous, dignified man, without very strong convictions upon any point, except such as related to material pleasures. But three features, the eyes, mouth,

and chin, removed from his face every suspicion of weakness, frivolity, or sensuality which his round rosy cheeks aroused, — notably the chin, which was square, compact, massive, and carried high in the air, its rigidity expressing at once the inflexibility of purpose and the pride, perhaps haughtiness, of its possessor. He was a man of large brain, of strong mind, and warm passions, the latter kept by severe discipline in entire subjection, but yet there, for good or ill according to the circumstances in which he might be placed.

He had not sat longer than five or six minutes in the dimly lighted parlor, when Cordelia, with an apology for having kept him waiting, entered the room. Her face was flushed. She had evidently been weeping; and it was apparent that she was making a violent effort to regain her composure for the interview, of whose importance the priest had received no intimation.

“My child,” he said after his first greeting to her, “I see you still suffer in consequence of your father’s death. Can you not become reconciled to his loss, — you whose life is yet to be lived, and from whose energy and devotion we have so much to expect?”

“I am reconciled, father,” said Cordelia, forcing a smile. “I have been weeping, I acknowledge, but not from the cause you suspect. I have something to tell you. A task has been imposed upon me which for a moment made my heart falter. I am still afraid to undertake it; and yet my duty is so plain, that I cannot resist.”

“Be a little more explicit, and perhaps I may be able to help you,” said the priest kindly. “What is this duty of which you speak?”

Cordelia told the story of the money in trembling tones. Padre Lamont listened attentively, without attempting any interruption.

“But this is not all,” she continued. “There is still

something for which I crave your advice and your blessing. My aunt and I are quite alone in the world. Neither of us has any taste for the mere pleasures of life, which are productive of nothing but weariness. So we have determined that this money, so miraculously recovered, shall be devoted to God. With the bishop's approval, and your sanction, father, we will found a new order of holy women; and the first house shall be established here. Our duties will be the education of young girls. In a few days we set out for France, and, while there, will not only obtain the money, but will endeavor, with your assistance, to make our project known to a few ladies of position, who may be induced to enter the order with us. I have already mentioned the subject to Mother Teresa, the superior of the convent; and she heartily approves."

While Cordelia was speaking, a marked change passed over the priest's features. At first his raised eyebrows and parted lips showed surprise, which rapidly gave way to a look of deep reflection tinged with melancholy. It seemed, finally, that he no longer heard her; for his eyes assumed that half-vacant, half-dreamy look which indicates the isolation of the individual in his own contemplations. And yet every word Cordelia uttered fell upon him with distinctness and force, resulting in an impression so indelible that no lapse of time could ever efface it. A deadly struggle was taking place within him, but the victory remained with his good spirit.

Cordelia finished, and stood before him awaiting his answer.

The priest spoke slowly and calmly, his voice by no means betraying the conflict which had just raged in his breast.

"It is a noble mission," he said. "God has been good in choosing you to carry out his holy purpose toward the

poor, ignorant sheep of his fold. You will renounce the world for a purer and more spiritual life. O my child," he added fervently, rising from his chair to place his hands upon her head, "may the Infinite Father bless and preserve you! May He keep you steadfast in the work you begin to-night!" He hesitated, and looked for a moment intently into her face.

"I am but an instrument in God's hands," said Cordelia gravely.

A few moments passed in silence. Then the priest spoke again.

"So you and Miss Héricourt go to France to get this money," he said. "I shall be glad to give you letters to the Bishop of Avignon, whom I know well. There will then be no difficulty about establishing your identity."

"Thank you, father. You are always thoughtful and kind," replied Cordelia. "Here are our photographs," she continued, taking them from her pocket as she spoke. "I thought it might be as well to send them to the bishop before we go. If you will forward them by to-morrow's mail, we shall be greatly obliged to you."

"An excellent idea," said the priest. "I will ask Bishop Lambert to certify to them with his name and seal. How like they are!" he continued, looking at the photographs attentively. "This one of you is really a speaking image. His Grace of Avignon will surely recognize you when he sees you. No better means could possibly be devised for proving you to be the veritable Héricourts. We shall miss you very much here in Santa Fe, but the knowledge of what you are doing for the Church and humanity will sustain us in our regret. And when you return, with the means of carrying out your intentions, you know how happy we shall be. Next to Rome, Avignon is the holiest of cities. For seventy years the Popes made it their residence; and there Laura, whom Petrarch loved, was born.

Her tomb stands in the Franciscan Church." His voice became more tender. Cordelia was about to speak, but he interrupted her by a gesture. "No more to-night," he said. "You are tired, while I"—he hesitated, as if seeking for words to express his thought. "Again, God bless you," he said finally. "You are a modern saint. I—I must go. I have delayed one of my most important duties."

And, before she could say another word, he had left the room.

CHAPTER V.

A CONSPIRACY.

“Get money ; still get money, boy,
No matter by what means.”

CORDELIA, her hands clasped before her, remained standing for a few moments in the centre of the room, where the priest had left her. Then she extinguished the light, and stepped out upon the veranda, overlooking the *patio*. The night was calm and still: overhead the moon, sailing rapidly, cast a flood of white light across the rough stones of the court-yard, and made the few flowers which bloomed in the centre lose their brilliant coloring. Far off in the distance Jose, the servant, was singing to the accompaniment of a violin, both voice and instrument, it must be confessed, somewhat the worse for wear, —

“Si mi dolor no te conmueve,
Si no te apiadas mi triste padecer,
Permittame Paulina, en que te nombre
Mi dulce amor, mi dulce amor, mi cara bien,
Pero, se mi amas tu seras amado,
Pues que en l’amarte se cifra mi placer,
He dicho asi mil veces y he jurado,
Antes morir, antes morir, que te aborecer.”

Cordelia, pre-occupied and perplexed, drew a chair toward her, and, sitting down, leaned her head on both hands, observing, as she did so, that the latter were hot and feverish. But was not this natural enough, after so exciting a day as

she had just passed, coming too, as it did, so soon after her father's death, while her mind was still depressed? Besides, Padre Lamont's strange behavior had somewhat startled her. Hitherto, in the course of their acquaintance, or friendship as it might fitly be called, his manner had always been quiet and dignified, enlivened now and then by a touch of humor, the outcome of his healthy animal spirits. But the mood in which he had appeared to her to-night was a wholly new one. Something had palpably disturbed him,—but what? Her communication to him had surely contained nothing to produce so extraordinary an effect. She had observed, too, that sometimes his eyes had eagerly sought hers, and, again, fallen beneath her glance, seeking even to avoid it. Had she offended him? Gradually, however, her thoughts wandered from this subject to the mission she was about to undertake, the mere idea filling her soul with a sense of nobility and elevation.

Suddenly a shadow darkened the doorway beside her; and Miss Héricourt, who had a wholesome horror of night air, which she always associated somehow with malaria and scorpions, stepped cautiously upon the veranda, and laid her hand on Cordelia's shoulder.

“Why! what are you doing here?” she asked, with as much astonishment as she was capable of exhibiting. “It is not wise to sit in this damp atmosphere. Padre Lamont left half an hour ago. Why do you not go to bed?”

“He has not been gone long, aunt,” Cordelia answered abstractedly. “And my head is so hot, I thought the air would cool it.”

“I heard the door close behind him long ago,” said Miss Héricourt. “But, my dear,” she added, taking one of her niece's hands in hers, “what is the matter with you? Your hands are burning. Are you ill?”

“No,” said Cordelia, rising to her feet, “not ill, but very tired, and” — As she spoke, a feeling of utter weariness

ness and helplessness overcame her. Jose's voice seemed suddenly to die away in the distance. The brilliant moonlight turned to a thick white mist; and she would have fallen had not Miss Héricourt placed one arm about her, and led her away into the house.

On the following day a rather singular scene was enacted in the Héricourts' sitting-room. It was a large apartment, barely lighted by three diminutive windows. The furniture, old and shabby as it was, still bore traces of former elegance; for the massive frames of carved oak were yet moderately well preserved, even if the upholstery of Spanish leather was worn and dilapidated. On one side of the room Major Héricourt had constructed a tall mantel-piece of deal boards, draped heavily with red and yellow damask, which likewise must have seen better days; as a close inspection of it revealed many cleverly wrought patches and darns. Upon this imposing structure were a large gilt clock and a pair of antiquated candelabra, which Miss Héricourt had brought from France, and given to her brother. They were, she said, very valuable; although the clock had never been known to go since old Baron Héricourt had purchased it more than half a century ago. There was something melancholy about this bold attempt to ornament the room, in contrast with the rough walls built of mud, and covered with a thin coating of lime. Overhead, the ceiling of jagged, uneven logs, through whose yawning apertures shingles of various forms and colors were distinctly visible, increased the strange effect. A large wooden shield of quaint design hung at the far end of the apartment; and upon it some Mexican hand had rudely carved three heads, supposed to represent the Holy Trinity. The faces were barbarously painted in rough dashes of white and red; while each was further decorated by long, flowing locks, and an immense black

mustache. A collar, fastened below the three ludicrous countenances, with a satin cravat tied in an exaggerated bow; and a gaudy dress of blue and yellow, terminating in a pair of impossible feet, set off the heads to advantage. The last-named garment was ingeniously contrived; for not only did it answer the purpose of costume, but served also to hide any little anatomical defects which might otherwise have been apparent. Still, Major Héricourt, but little impressed by the artistic attributes of this shield, had, on seeing it for the first time, fallen back upon a chair, almost choking with suppressed laughter; and even Miss Héricourt had smiled in her perplexed, unmeaning way. A wooden bracket supporting a large doll hung on each side of the Holy Trinity. One of these puppets, intended for the Virgin, was dressed in white satin, profusely trimmed with tawdry silver lace. The other, St. Joseph, wore a brown silk robe, adorned with scraps of nondescript finery. Notwithstanding these characteristic decorations, which seemed to speak to the beholder of an age far remote and obscure, and in spite of the comparative comfort of the room, it was hardly one which a person of delicate sensibility would care to inhabit. The small windows, filled in with microscopic bits of isinglass, were so irregular, that they gave a distorted appearance to every thing in the apartment. Perhaps it was owing to this fact, that the faces of the two ladies seated at the large table in the centre of the floor looked so wry and contorted.

These ladies were Mrs. Aldergrove and Miss Héricourt, who sat facing each other. Both were attired in gowns of severe black, each had her hands folded demurely before her, and each was so wanting in any depth of expression that they recalled effigies of persons long ago dead and gone. Perhaps Mrs. Aldergrove's figure was drawn up a little more severely than her cousin's, and the corners of her thin, compressed lips were rather sarcastic in aspect

than weak. Between the two stood Margaret, her well-shaped head thrown back, and her eyes half closed. From time to time she opened the latter to cast a glance of concentrated anger and hate at Miss Héricourt, who, however, did not appear to notice it. The only sign of disturbance shown by her was in the restless wandering of her eyes from one object in the room to another.

"I do not wish to cross the ocean at all," she said, addressing Mrs. Aldergrove. "I told Cordelia so in the beginning. But, as to my going without her, that is out of the question. I am unable to attempt such a thing."

"It seems odd that Cordelia should be ill," said Margaret. "She was quite well yesterday. Even as late as nine o'clock last evening she was closeted with that disagreeable confessor of hers, Padre Lamont."

"How can you call Padre Lamont disagreeable, Margaret?" inquired Miss Héricourt, elevating her eyebrows a little. "Cordelia," she continued calmly, "has not been well for some time. She has had much to bear,—so much that I wonder she has not succumbed before. You surely remember, Margaret"—

"What is the matter with my cousin?" interrupted the latter imperatively.

"We should be obliged to you for the particulars of her condition," said Mrs. Aldergrove with bland composure.

"She has a fever. I thought I had already told you," replied Miss Héricourt, unmoved. "I found her on the veranda last evening, fainting with weakness; so I took her up to bed, and sent Jose for Dr. Baldwin. He says she is very ill, and that she is on no account to undertake the journey to France. Now," continued Miss Héricourt, shrugging her shoulders, and spreading out her fat hands, "What is to be done? I certainly cannot go alone. I have sent however, for Padre Lamont, and shall be guided

entirely by his opinion in the matter. He always gives excellent advice," she added, rolling her eyes at Margaret.

"I have no doubt of it," she replied stiffly. "At the same time, my dear cousin, do you not think we have some claim to your confidence? We are nearer to you than this priest, whose advice, I fear, conceals some selfish motive. To us you can impute no such design."

"Oh, no! of course not," said Miss Héricourt, glancing about her helplessly.

"I understand," Margaret continued, still regarding her cousin from beneath her half-closed lids, "your repugnance to crossing the ocean alone. But Cordelia's unexpected illness should not delay the execution of your plans. Of course, this sudden alteration in your worldly affairs must affect us in some degree. We can remain here no longer; and last evening mother and I decided to go abroad, and spend the remainder of our lives there, — or, at least, to stay until we are tired of it. Now, why should you not go with us? We will take you as far as your destination, Avignon: and by that time, should Cordelia recover, she can join you; or, if not, you can make other arrangements about returning to Santa Fe. What do you think of the idea?"

Miss Héricourt glanced at Mrs. Aldergrove, whose expression had changed to one of expectancy. Then she looked at the table, and finally raised her eyes to Margaret's.

"You wish me to go with you?" she asked, as if she had imperfectly understood.

"Yes," said Margaret, briefly and distinctly.

"The plan is an admirable one," said Mrs. Aldergrove, drawing a black-bordered handkerchief from her pocket, and passing it over her dry lips. "It would be wrong in you not to take advantage of it, my dear cousin."

“And Cordelia, — what of her?” asked Miss Héricourt uneasily.

“It is very strange,” said Margaret, “but it was she herself who proposed it. We were talking of the matter yesterday, — of the money, I mean; and she said smilingly, ‘Now, should any thing happen to me, you could take my aunt to France to get this fortune.’”

“She little knew, poor creature,” said Mrs. Aldergrove pathetically, “how soon her idle words were to be verified. How unforeseen are the manifestations of Providence, cousin!”

“I fear I do not quite understand,” said Miss Héricourt, in a puzzled tone. “Were Cordelia left here alone, what would become of her?”

“Had you a little more patience, I would have come to that,” replied Mrs. Aldergrove, with the faintest trace of irritation. “She spoke of the convent, of the ‘good sisters,’ as she expressed it.” She paused for a moment, and then added, “I know well what going into a convent means. A mere excuse for idleness, and freedom from such responsibilities as the Lord has seen fit to impose upon us. Still, all do not think as I do; and I can make allowances for your faith, cousin, and Cordelia’s.”

Poor Miss Héricourt was at her wits’ end. She was quite unable to argue, either with Mrs. Aldergrove or Margaret; but she was aware, nevertheless, that something must be said. Before she could make any reply, however, the door opened; and Jose announced Padre Lamont. At the mention of his name, Margaret smiled contemptuously, and walked toward one of the windows, which was just low enough to admit of a view into the street. Miss Héricourt drew a long breath of relief when a few seconds later the priest entered the room. He was evidently not in his usual good spirits, but his manner was as cordial as ever. He shook hands with Miss Héricourt, and

bowed courteously to Mrs. Aldergrove, glancing hastily at the motionless figure at the window. He hesitated for a moment, and then advanced a few steps.

“My child,” — he began —

Margaret turned, and faced him rather haughtily. “You are mistaken,” she said. “I am Margaret Aldergrove.”

Padre Lamont started, overcome with amazement at her resemblance to Cordelia. As he uttered a hasty apology, he regarded her with a close scrutiny in which doubt was mingled. During his visits to the house, frequent though they were, he had never seen Margaret before. She, however, was familiar with his appearance, and had often, from her bedroom window, watched him come and go. She now acknowledged his polite excuse by a slight inclination of her head. Then, with some remark to Miss Héricourt, she left the room, followed by her mother.

Padre Lamont sat down, and passed his hand mechanically across his forehead.

“What a wonderful likeness!” he said. “How like Cordelia! and yet” — He stopped abruptly, and turned to Miss Héricourt. “You sent for me. Is there any thing that I can do for you?” he asked.

Miss Héricourt related what had happened since the preceding evening as well as she could remember; her memory being always defective, even in regard to circumstances which had just occurred. She gave, it is true, the details of Cordelia’s illness, but dwelt upon them slightly, confining herself more particularly to the dilemma in which she now found herself about the journey.

The priest listened attentively to her somewhat rambling narrative, showing no sign of impatience or distress. Even when she finally finished, he did not speak immediately, but sat seemingly lost in thought, his eyes fixed abstractedly upon the drugget of black and white cloth which covered the centre of the earthen floor.

"Well, father," said Miss Héricourt presently, "what is to be done?"

"I was thinking, wondering," he answered. "I hardly like to assume the responsibility of advising you." There was an irresolution in his tone which was unusual.

"Cordelia has, it seems, said something about the matter herself," Miss Héricourt continued; "but her idea is a strange one, and I hardly think you will agree to it. In the course of a conversation held yesterday with Mrs. Aldergrove, she expressed the wish that I should go abroad with my cousins in case any thing should happen to keep her at home. At least, that is what Mrs. Aldergrove tells me; and I presume she speaks the truth. I cannot deny, however, that I am unfavorably impressed with Margaret as my acquaintance with her progresses. She is very like Cordelia, it is true, but only in personal appearance, nothing more. I fear, father, that she is the possessor of a bad temper; and, when I contemplate the idea of taking so long a journey with her and her mother, a feeling of horror comes over me."

Miss Héricourt's placid countenance, as she made this speech, was scarcely in keeping with the idea conveyed; but she rolled her eyes significantly toward the door through which the Aldergroves had just passed, and said in a low tone, "I am sure, father, they are a couple of wicked women."

"Oh! hardly that," replied the priest gravely; "but you would not do well, I think, to leave Cordelia here alone and ill. It is unfortunate, this sudden indisposition. It is not dangerous, I trust?" His glance bespoke something more than mere inquiry. Miss Héricourt opened her lips to answer; but, before she could do so, a sudden deafening tumult was heard from the street. Had the entire population of Santa Fe left their houses for the purpose of outrivalling each other in shouting and sing-

ing? One would have thought so, indeed, on beholding the extraordinary spectacle which met the eyes of Miss Héricourt and the priest as they hurried to the window to discover, if possible, the cause of the uproar.

Advancing slowly up the dirty street was a still dirtier troop of Mexicans, — men, women, and children, — arrayed in all the picturesque brilliancy of their holiday attire, and preceded by a well-known citizen, who rejoiced in the name of Jesus Maria. His costume was enlivened by a number of cotton handkerchiefs of various colors attached to a cord about his waist; and he carried a broken violin, upon which several popular airs were squeaked out with well-defined discord, as he walked along with an exaggerated, mincing gait, his head nodding from side to side, like that of a porcelain Chinese mandarin. The company of men and women who followed him were singing boisterously, if, indeed, the hideous noise which characterized their performance could be dignified by the name of singing; and behind them, borne aloft upon a table, sat a doll, similar to those which ornamented the Héricourts' sitting-room. It was dressed with great attempt at magnificence, its white satin gown and gold lace contrasting ludicrously with its painted cheeks and heavy black mustache. A Mexican, decorated with much gold braid and fringe, walked on each side of this absurd figure, holding up carefully a dilapidated umbrella, as though to protect the saint from the hot sun, which streamed down upon the motley throng. A large mob of disorderly persons completed the procession, which passed slowly and solemnly along.

Padre Lamont sighed, and turned away from the window in a few moments; while Miss Héricourt, to whom this grotesque parade was a novelty, looked at him inquiringly.

“I cannot tell you,” he said, “how discouraging it is to witness such exhibitions. This is the method these peo-

ple take of praying for rain. It grieves me to see how little impressed they are by the earnest labor performed in their behalf. Sometimes I quite despair of ever bettering their condition; but I do not intend to give up," he added, with a faint smile. "And now, to return to our interrupted conversation, would it be possible for me to see Cordelia? She cannot be dangerously ill. She is not too ill to speak to me?"

"Oh, no!" Miss Héricourt replied composedly. "She particularly desires to see you. Dr. Baldwin says there is no immediate cause for alarm, but he recommends rest for some time to come. If you will follow me, father, I will take you to her."

They rose to leave the apartment as she finished speaking; the priest walking with bowed head, and hands clasped upon his breast, until, under Miss Héricourt's guidance, he entered the darkened room where Cordelia lay.

CHAPTER VI.

PERSUADED.

“A man in the presence of his tyrant has no character and no opinions. Thamas Kouli Kan once supped with a courtier. A new sort of pulse was served. ‘How pleasing and wholesome is this pulse!’ said the monarch. ‘Nothing more pleasing and wholesome,’ said the courtier. After supper Thamas Kouli Kan felt indisposed. He could not sleep. When he rose, he said, ‘There is nothing more detestable and unwholesome than that pulse.’ — ‘Nothing more detestable and unwholesome,’ repeated the courtier. ‘But,’ said the monarch, ‘you did not think so last night. What has changed your opinion?’ — ‘Sirrah,’ replied the courtier, ‘I am the slave of your Majesty, and not that of the pulse. I can now, therefore, curse the latter with impunity.’”

THERE was a small bed standing in one corner of the room, and a square piece of carpet covered the floor. In the dim light Padre Lamont could distinguish Cordelia's form and the figure of a Mexican girl, who had been temporarily engaged as nurse. The latter was sitting near the head of the bed, rocking her body backward and forward with a jerky sort of movement. In her hands she held a rosary, which she pressed to her lips from time to time, with muttered ejaculations and disconnected bits of prayer; but, on seeing Miss Héricourt and the priest enter, she rose hastily, and retreated to a distant corner, where the gloom partly concealed her.

Cordelia was lying motionless, with her eyes fixed vacantly upon the opposite wall; and, as Padre Lamont bent over her, no sign of recognition was visible on her face.

“My poor child, I am truly grieved to see you thus,” he

said, speaking in a low tone. "Can I be of any help to you?"

She turned her eyes toward him, but did not reply. Suddenly she started up, pushing back impatiently the heavy masses of dark hair which fell over her temples and across her breast.

"Where are the boxes?" she exclaimed. "Give them to me. They are filled with gold; and it is mine, — all mine. But first get the spade, and dig, — deeper — still deeper. Ah! there they are at last! Six — eight" — Then, laying her hand upon the priest's arm, she added gently, "Help me to carry them. They are so heavy that I cannot lift them."

Miss Héricourt's small gray eyes opened to their fullest extent. "Why, she is delirious!" she exclaimed. "What is to be done now, father? How shall we discover what she wishes to do about the journey? She does not recognize either of us. Nothing more unfortunate than this could have occurred. Juana, you are a wicked girl," she added, turning to the Mexican. "Why did you not come to call me, as I told you to do if she became worse? How long has she been in this state? Come here and answer me at once."

As Miss Héricourt's conversation was perfectly unintelligible to the natives of Santa Fe, being composed chiefly of English, with here and there a word of badly pronounced Spanish, the foregoing questions had to be repeated by Padre Lamont before Juana could be made to understand what was required of her. She stood in some awe of the priest, and came forward reluctantly as he spoke to her, still clasping her rosary with trembling fingers. She was of medium height; and her dull black hair, olive skin, and full red lips, combined, as they were, with large, expressive eyes, would have formed a pleasing enough exterior, had not an unsavory and generally unwashed ap-

pearance accompanied them. She was dressed in several petticoats of different colors, worn one over the other, and arranged so that a few inches of each was visible. A remarkable feature of the New-Mexican character is the fact, that every one wears his or her entire wardrobe at once. As many shirts or petticoats as man or woman may happen to possess are put on, one over the other, with a startling disregard for comfort; and it may even be said, that a person's social standing depends in a measure upon the amount and variety of his clothes. Juana's collection was not one by any means to be despised. Her petticoats were four in number: and on each side of her waist hung a bright cotton handkerchief, obviously, however, not intended for use; as a close inspection of the *rebosa* covering her head might have tended to show.

She answered Padre Lamont's questions somewhat sullenly, declaring she was unable to tell how long the señorita had been acting so queerly. It might have been an hour, it might have been two. She could only recollect definitely, that the señorita had suddenly started up, laughing like a very demon, and saying things which sounded strange. Overcome with terror, Juana had only been able to seize her beads, and call upon the Holy Virgin for protection.

She was a voluble person, like the rest of her class, and would, doubtless, have continued in this strain for some time, had not the priest cut short her discourse by bidding her go at once for Dr. Baldwin, a command which the girl obeyed willingly.

Cordelia still continued to talk in a random, excited manner; and all attempts to rouse in her a spark of proper intelligence proved useless. In vain did Padre Lamont question her in regard to her conversation with Mrs. Aldergrove; endeavoring, by going carefully over the events of the past few days, to restore her to something

approaching rationality. She was clearly hopelessly delirious.

While waiting for Dr. Baldwin, there was silence for a time, broken only by the sound of Cordelia's voice making assertions about the money, incongruously mingled with exclamations in regard to the voyage, and prayers to the end that she might be aided by Divine Will in her undertaking.

It is possible that Miss Héricourt was affected by her niece's sudden and serious illness ; but, if so, she kept her feelings entirely to herself, only displaying the partly unsettled state of her mind by occasionally rising from her chair to pace the floor with a slow, measured tread.

Padre Lamont sat quietly by the bedside, his gaze now fixed gloomily upon the carpet, now upon Cordelia's unresponsive face. Once, in looking at her, a sudden vague emotion swept over him ; and unconsciously he closed his eyes, his breath coming and going quickly. Of what was he thinking at that moment ? Something evidently not to be entertained ; for, with a gesture of determination, he rose, and going to the window, which was open, pushed aside the curtain.

Before him was a crimson sun, upon a background of pale primrose. Just above the edge of its fiery disk stretched a long line of purple hills, their outlines well defined by a narrow band of light, like a golden braid, which, lower, merged itself with a delicate rose-colored mist. Lower still, long shadows crept stealthily, changing the brilliant emerald of the foliage into a dull, lustreless green.

The priest stood for a while watching the gradual approach of twilight descending from above, like a gray curtain. He seemed overcome by strong yet indefinable feelings, which threatened to master his self-possession. The spectacle before him, the calm beauty of the sunset, and the painful stillness of the outside world, enabled him

finally, though with a visible effort, to shake off his abstraction. He turned to Miss Héricourt, and said quietly, —

“Should Cordelia not recover immediately, is there any possibility of obtaining the money without your personal application?”

“I fear not, father,” she answered. “Were there any such possibility, we should never have thought about going abroad at all. As matters stand now, we must either put off the journey indefinitely, which would be annoying when the immense distance we have to go is considered, or else accept the only alternative.”

“You mean to accompany the Aldergroves, I suppose. It would not be right to do so under the circumstances. You could not leave Cordelia here alone and ill. Better by far lose the money, Miss Héricourt, than have aught with which to reproach your conscience.” He spoke seriously, but Miss Héricourt did not seem to notice the tone.

“Would my conscience reproach me, father?” she asked, with a vacant expression. “I never thought about it in that light, but I understand what you mean. Your opinion is worth much more than mine; and, of course, I shall do as you say.”

At this moment Dr. Baldwin entered the room, and, after a few moments’ conversation with Miss Héricourt, examined his patient, who had grown quieter. She was suffering, he said, from the delirium incidental to the fever; and it would be out of the question to attempt the proposed journey for some time to come.

“But how long will she remain in this horrible state?” asked Miss Héricourt, with perplexed anxiety.

“I cannot tell exactly,” answered the doctor. “It may continue off and on for several weeks.”

“I think you should take Dr. Baldwin into your confi-

dence," said Padre Lamont. "Perhaps he may be able to advise you better than I."

"True," she answered. "But be kind enough to tell him yourself, father. The particulars are confusing, and I fear I cannot remember them all correctly. This is, indeed, a trying period of my life," she added impressively.

The priest accordingly related the whole matter to the doctor, mentioning Cordelia's conversation with Mrs. Aldergrove, but at the same time not attempting to hide his reluctance to counsel Miss Héricourt to accept her cousin's offer.

Dr. Baldwin naturally was as adverse to the conceived plan as was Padre Lamont.

"I cannot conceal from you, Miss Héricourt," he said decidedly, "that in my opinion such a proceeding would be actually heartless. In making the offer, your cousins are doubtless actuated by motives of the purest kindness and a desire to be of service to your niece; but it is a mistaken kindness, and you would do wrong to take advantage of it. I can only advise you to be patient until the affair can be properly managed." Then, after a few directions as to the treatment of Cordelia, he shook hands with Miss Héricourt and Padre Lamont, and left the room.

The latter soon after took his departure also. The room had grown unbearable to him; and he longed to get out into the open air, where he could breathe freely.

Miss Héricourt, left alone with Cordelia, sat quietly in the centre of the floor, with her hands folded, as usual, in her lap. The door opened softly in a few minutes; and Margaret entered, holding in her hand a lighted lamp, which threw its dim, uncertain rays across the bed, and revealed the pallor of Cordelia's features.

"Have you spoken to Padre Lamont, cousin?" she asked, bending, as she spoke, over Cordelia, and looking searchingly at her.

“Yes, Margaret ; and he thinks as I do, — that my going without Cordelia would be preposterous. You do not know how ill she is, — that she is delirious.”

“Yes, I know,” Margaret replied, moving away from the bed, and placing the lamp on the table. “I met Juana as she was going for Dr. Baldwin, and she told me. Let me sit here beside you, cousin, and talk to you a while ; for I have much to say. Padre Lamont has advised you not to accept our offer, but I was prepared for that. Think, however, of how Cordelia herself would regard it. She is the one to be considered ; and, in carrying out her wishes, you do her a far greater kindness in reality than by remaining here against her will, be she ever so ill. Think again before you decide.”

Now, it was a peculiar feature of Miss Héricourt’s character, that it was an absolute necessity for her to lean upon some one else, morally speaking. A current theory affirms, that half the people in the world are born to command the remaining half. And, indeed, had Miss Héricourt been the most obscure of slaves, she could not have belonged more completely to the latter class. Just at present she found herself cut off from her niece’s support, and in consequence turned involuntarily to Margaret, her dislike to the girl fading suddenly away. Margaret understood thoroughly all the weak points in the other’s organization, and made haste to turn her advantage to the best possible account in the short time she knew was at her disposal.

Poor Miss Héricourt, when brought face to face with Margaret’s strongly expressed views and arguments, gradually found her scruples disappear until nothing remained of them but the faintest outlines. She began to think, that, after all, Cordelia’s idea was both admirable and expedient ; and by degrees she became as anxious to put it into execution as a short time previously she had been to avoid it.

Margaret watched her hesitation and slow yielding with a feeling of supreme exultation, and her manner to Miss Héricourt became so suave and gentle that the latter wondered how she could ever have misjudged her. Mrs. Aldergrove came also, taking her place in the sick-room, and performing tenderly all the little delicate attentions so necessary to invalids. Miss Héricourt soon came to the conclusion, that her cousins were deserving of her highest regard ; and little by little she glided, unconsciously almost, into their plan.

By bedtime that night, after much adroit conversation on the part of the Aldergroves, and some very weak resistance from Miss Héricourt, it was finally decided that the three women should go to France together, while Cordelia remained in Santa Fe, to be cared for by the good sisters of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

CHAPTER VII.

THE WHIP-HAND.

"Il y a un pays où les joies sont visibles, mais fausses, et les chagrins cachés, mais réels." — LA BRUYÈRE.

ON leaving Miss Héricourt, Padre Lamont went to the rooms which he occupied in the house of a well-to-do Mexican. They were two in number, one serving as bedroom, the other as study. He entered the latter, and, lighting the lamp, sat down before his table. Every available space in the apartment was occupied by books, — French, Latin, English, — from whose worn and dusty bindings a dull atmosphere seemed to emanate. Writing materials, volumes of reference, and pamphlets, were piled high upon the table, together with pages of closely written manuscript.

For some time the priest sat motionless, his head resting upon his hands, lost in thought apparently. His temples throbbed painfully, and confused images passed through his mind in rapid succession. He took up a book presently, and read a few paragraphs; but his attention refused to fix itself: and in a few moments he threw the volume aside, and, stretching forth his hand, extinguished the lamp. Then a flood of light streamed in through the window, making a broad silver path across the earthen floor, extending up the rough wall, and resting upon the crucifix of ebony and ivory that hung there. The priest

rose from his chair impulsively, and, approaching the crucifix, fell upon his knees, and bowed his head reverently. The moonlight touched his hair and a portion of his black robe.

He remained thus, praying, for nearly an hour, hardly conscious that the ideas which hitherto had assailed him vaguely were assuming definite forms. He knew, however, that he seemed to be drifting far away from divine protection into gloom and shadow, peopled with indistinct shapes which momentarily grew clearer and more terrible. The truth which lay slumbering in the depths of his soul was now breaking forth into the broad light of day, and see it he must.

He rose finally, and, entering his bedroom, threw himself down to sleep. His long-pent-up emotions had partly expended themselves in that burst of agonized prayer, and he felt calmer than he had done for some time.

On the following morning, however, he was unrefreshed by the short repose he had had. He went to the window, and watched the daybreak, inhaling at the same time the cool morning air which came into the room. The eastern sky was flushed with pale scarlet, streaked with gold; and the whole atmosphere seemed to catch the rosy reflection. In the street below, a troop of noisy Mexicans passed by, on their way to the river to bathe.

Padre Lamont made a hasty toilet, and, entering his study, knelt for a moment in silent prayer, feeling, as he did so, a sense of tranquillity and resignation. He almost smiled as he recalled his vehement outburst of the night before, looking back upon it with undisturbed composure. He wondered at his impetuosity. What had caused that tempest of emotion? Surely, the reason to which he had attributed it was merely a fancy born of his own vivid imagination, and wanting in actual support. He had been building suppositions upon a most unsubstantial basis; and

he now found, much to his relief, that he was able to contemplate Cordelia in fancy, with sentiments of unimpassioned affection. No fiery agitation mingled itself with his present thought of her, and he was conscious of having gained another victory over himself. In being allowed to direct a pure soul toward God, he enjoyed a blessed privilege, and one which should amply satisfy him. He knew that his influence had prompted Cordelia to devote her newly acquired fortune and her life to the highest service permitted on earth, but with this reflection came a feeling of sadness he was powerless to control. And then Cordelia's illness and Miss Aldergrove's proposition occurred to him. It did not seem possible that Miss Héricourt would take advantage of the offer. That she was intensely weak, and open to any strong influence, he was aware ; but he was convinced of her affection for her niece, and did not suppose she would leave the girl helpless and ill, in order that a sum of money might be procured within a given time.

All these things passed rapidly through his mind as he made himself a cup of coffee by the aid of a small spirit-lamp. The day had begun its course ; and, where the moonbeams had rested the night before, the yellow sunlight now danced joyously. There was something in this calm brilliancy which brought a sense of repose and quiet enjoyment to him. He shook off his abstraction finally, and sat down to his table to write, just as Jose, the Héricourts' servant, knocked at the door, and then, entering, handed him a note. The priest took it mechanically, and broke the seal. The note read as follows :—

“MY DEAR PADRE LAMONT,—You will doubtless be surprised on reading this ; and I fear the intelligence I have to impart may also annoy you to some extent, although the lenity with which you have always treated my shortcomings gives me no reason to expect your grave displeasure. The matter is this : Since my interview with you yesterday, I have decided to accept the proposition made by my

cousins, who are, I have discovered, very different from what I imagined them to be, and thoroughly worthy of my esteem and affection. I shall go with them to France, and endeavor to obtain Cordelia's fortune and my own unaided. Whether this plan will be successful or not can only be determined by time; but, should my efforts prove unavailing, Cordelia can join me abroad whenever her health will permit her to do so. I shall communicate my success or failure to you as soon as possible; and I rely upon your kindness, dear father, to make the necessary arrangements should Cordelia be obliged to follow me.

"Mrs. Aldergrove and her daughter will accompany me only as far as Havre, whence they intend to start for an extended tour of the Continent, leaving me to go to Avignon. My great regret is, that I must leave Cordelia; but it is mitigated by the thought that she will be in excellent hands at the convent, and that I am merely carrying out her own desire, expressed a few days ago to Mrs. Aldergrove. Should you have any suggestions to make, dear father, before we leave Santa Fe, which will be on the day after to-morrow, I beg that you will communicate them to me without delay. I should also be glad to consult with you in regard to placing my niece in the convent. She still remains in the same horrible condition, and talks continually about the money.

"With heartfelt thanks, dear father, for your many attentions during the past trying days, believe me your very devoted daughter,

"ANASTASIA HÉRICOURT."

The reading of the above caused complex emotions to take possession of the priest. To his experienced eyes it was evident that another hand than Miss Héricourt's had superintended the writing of the letter. He feared instinctively that she had unwittingly been led by Margaret and her mother, though he conceived of no motive which could induce them to persuade Miss Héricourt to go abroad without her niece. He resolved to make one more attempt in Cordelia's behalf; so, throwing the letter upon the table, he took his hat from a wooden peg on the wall, and went directly to the Héricourts' house.

Jose, who admitted him, bade him enter the sitting-room, where Miss Héricourt was found seated with Margaret.

A faint color came into the older lady's cheeks as the

priest entered, his face wearing an unusually grave expression. Margaret rose, as if to leave the room; but Miss Héricourt, with evident embarrassment, begged her to remain, saying that nothing of a private nature was to be discussed.

“You received my note, father?” she asked, fixing her expressionless eyes upon him.

“Yes,” he answered: “it is on that account that I am here. I fear, Miss Héricourt,” he continued, after a pause, “you have decided hurriedly, and without properly weighing the consequences of your action. Why should you be in such haste to secure this money? A few weeks’ delay cannot be of material importance. The fortune is yours and Cordelia’s. Whenever you claim it, be it now or two months hence, it will be placed in your hands. Besides, have you no scruples about leaving your niece?”

“Scruples? Oh, yes! of course I have,” replied Miss Héricourt calmly. “I think I told you so particularly in my note. But I am not leaving Cordelia alone, father. She will go to the convent, and be well cared for there; receiving, indeed, far more attention than we could give her. As to the haste, it does not seem to me unnatural. Cordelia may remain ill for weeks; and, even should she then recover, she will be too feeble probably to undertake a journey. Think, father, of the work to be done with this money. Cordelia, I am sure, would bid me go without delay. You know how greatly her heart is set upon this enterprise.”

“You are right, cousin,” said Margaret. “It would be absurd to defer the journey indefinitely; and, since my mother and I have decided to go abroad, you could have no better opportunity for carrying out Cordelia’s plan. I am sure,” she added, turning to the priest, “that Miss Héricourt will have no difficulty in securing the fortune. But, my dear cousin, what do you mean by speaking of

work to be done with this money? Have you already decided upon your manner of spending it? Remember the story of the boy and his basket of eggs." She spoke with attempted playfulness; but there was an unpleasant light in her eyes, which did not escape Padre Lamont's keen perception.

"Can it be possible," exclaimed Miss Héricourt, clasping her fat hands, "that I forgot to tell you that portion of the arrangement? My dear Margaret, Cordelia is a very good Catholic, — a much better one than I am, although I shall always remain faithful to our holy religion. Cordelia, however, is a saint; and she has decided to found an order with this money, and strive by this means to educate the ignorant New-Mexican girls. It will be a glorious work, will it not?"

Margaret did not reply directly. Her eyes were half-closed, and her lips tightly compressed. "I heard Cordelia say something of this sort last evening," she said presently, speaking slowly and distinctly, "but I supposed her words to be merely the ravings of delirium. Otherwise I can hardly imagine any one contemplating such a thing. However, some particular influence, doubtless, instigated the idea." She cast a sidelong glance at the priest.

Padre Lamont returned the look frankly. "The hope that this work would one day be accomplished has long been cherished by me, Miss Aldergrove," he said; "and I have often expressed it to Miss Héricourt and her niece. If this can be called influencing them, then certainly I have done so. Had I employed more decided means toward the desired end, that is, had I actually asked them to use this money, as they, of their own free will, have concluded to do, I should not feel that I had acted improperly. It is my fervent wish, as well as my duty, to advance the interests of the Church; and whatever tends to gratify

this ambition cannot be otherwise than commendable. I do not think Miss Héricourt and her niece could have put their money to a better use."

"Perhaps not," said Margaret, with dignity. "But, my dear cousin, I think I will now go to Cordelia. Padre Lamont has probably some advice to offer which it would not interest me to hear. I will return later."

"Ah! do not go, Margaret," cried Miss Héricourt, who dreaded being left alone with the priest, for fear she might inadvertently change her mind. "Padre Lamont, I am sure, has nothing to say which" —

"You are right," he interrupted quickly. "I have nothing to say, Miss Héricourt. As your priest and friend, my advice has already been proffered: therefore I have finished. Be assured that all will be done for Cordelia's comfort during your absence." He rose to go as he spoke. "If there is any thing that I can do for you, pray command me." He uttered the words in so constrained a tone, that Miss Héricourt looked up in faint surprise.

"If you will kindly make arrangements at the convent," she faltered, with a slight feeling of shame.

"Certainly. It shall be done immediately. I shall come again, to bid you farewell. I cannot stop to see Cordelia this morning, as I am rather pressed for time." He shook hands gravely with Miss Héricourt, and, bowing formally to Margaret, left the room.

Miss Héricourt rolled her eyes from side to side with some evidence of uneasiness. "O Margaret!" she said, "I fear he is greatly displeased with me. Had we not better give it up? There is really no use in it, after all. Padre Lamont is right."

"'No use in it?'" echoed Margaret sharply. "Why, surely you will not go back upon your word now that our arrangements are made. How childish you are!" she

added, more gently. "You never know your own mind from one moment to the other. Last evening you thought Cordelia's plan would be a pleasing diversion after your recent suffering, and now you ask me to release you from your promise. It would be too absurd to give up the idea at this late hour."

"Certainly it would," said Miss Héricourt feebly. "I was only joking. What a comfort it is," she added reflectively, "to have some one at hand upon whom you can rely. Now, Padre Lamont is an excellent man, and I am devotedly attached to him; but then, he is a man: and only a woman can thoroughly comprehend another woman. It is for this reason that I could never make up my mind to marry. Men are so selfish, that their opinions are of no value in themselves. I like good, strong, sensible women, such as you and Cordelia. I have faith in your ideas."

"That is right," said Margaret approvingly. "Of course, I am inferior to Cordelia; but I am willing to do all I can for you. Shall we go now, and see how my cousin is?"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DEPARTURE.

“Full of strange oaths. Sudden and quick in quarrel.”

THE day but one following was that appointed for the departure from Santa Fe, and at nine o'clock that morning the stage-coach stood in the *plaza* in readiness for the long and tedious journey to the United States. There were four enormous horses attached to the vehicle, and the driver had already seized his whip and reins. To judge from the muttered exclamations expressive of disappointment, which now and then escaped him, he was waiting impatiently for the signal to depart. His assistant—guard, he would have been called in England, although he was in reality nothing more than a cook and general helper—stood on the sidewalk beneath the roof of the wide *portal*, looking first in one direction and then in another, giving vent unhesitatingly to the far from amiable feelings which filled his breast. His remarks were made in a strange mixture of English and Spanish, and consisted principally of oaths more forcible than elegant. The passengers, likewise loud in their complaints, were all in their places—no, not all, for there were still three vacant seats at the rear end of the conveyance; and it was evident, from the language used, that the persons who intended to occupy them were keeping the stage waiting by persisting in their non-appearance. All along the dusty street for some dis-

tance, and under the *portal*, stood a motley crowd of soldiers, teamsters, and Mexicans, who kept up a running commentary on the incidents of the situation, while at the same time they seemed to enjoy the discomfiture of the driver and his partner.

"How much longer am I to wait for them women, I'd like to know?" inquired the former presently of the stage-agent, who stood by the door of the vehicle, talking with a passenger. "Here's just one hour lost of the best part of the day; and I've got to get to Tecalote to-night if I bust all the traces there is in the world, and keep the critters a-goin' till midnight."

"I can't imagine what keeps them," replied the agent. "Their baggage has been here an hour. I'll send round and see; and if they don't come in another half-hour, why, just you go ahead without them. They'll have to follow in the next stage, or else stay in Santa Fe."

"It's an infernal nuisance, that's what it is!" said the driver with a growl. "If there's any thing wrong, ten chances to one there's a woman in the case; and now there's three on 'em. What women want in a country like this, Padre Lamont himself couldn't tell to save him; and he's just the smartest man as ever I came across."

"Who are they, anyway?" inquired a passenger, who was a sutler's clerk on his way to St. Louis to purchase supplies.

"Miss Héricourt, Miss Cordelia Héricourt, and Mrs. Aldergrove," replied the agent, reading from the way-list he held in his hands. "You know Major Héricourt, who was killed by the Navajos last month? Well, these are all kin of his, — one's his daughter, and one's his sister, and the other's his something or other, — I don't know exactly what. If it wa'n't for the circumstances of the case," he added, assuming an air of importance, "damn me if I'd stop the stage five minutes for them. But you see, the

major was true blue if ever there was one, and he died like a soldier. Taking this into consideration, it's little enough to wait a while for his sister and his orphan daughter."

"Oh! wait for them by all means," said another passenger, a big, broad-chested man, with a face of unusual intelligence. "They will be partly under my charge until we reach Independence."

"Oh, ho! under your charge, eh, Professor!" exclaimed a good-natured looking German. "And now tell us whether Mrs. Hoveden does not object to your travelling eight hundred miles in a stage-coach with three young ladies under your charge."

"No, Mr. Glatz, she does not," replied the other deliberately. "Nor is it remarkable when we consider that two of the young ladies are fifty years old apiece, and that there is said to be safety in numbers, and, further, that I am a respectable member of society, a teacher, and the head of a promising family."

"I wish my wife would act that way," said Glatz. "But she is as jealous of me as was Francisquita of Rafael Torres. You know, she stuck a knife into his heart because he picked up another woman's fan. Not that Mrs. Glatz would murder me after that Mexican fashion," he added after an expressive pause, "but she'd be certain sure to make things so devilish unpleasant that I'd end by throwing myself into the Rio Grande."

"Well, if you did, it wouldn't drown you," said, with a broad grin, a teamster near by. "I crossed it last week, and it scarcely wet my horse's feet. But we never knew before that Mrs. Glatz was a jealous woman."

"Oh! I don't object on the whole," said Glatz complacently. "She thinks me very attractive,—much too attractive for such work as escorting ladies to Independence."

"Well!" cried the driver with sudden vehemence. "I'll be totally blowed to everlasting smash if I wait here another minute! Here's all the passengers a-grumblin' and a-growlin' like a family of grizzlies. But," he added, as though he had reconsidered his determination, "I'll give 'em five more minutes; and then, if they don't come, off I goes, or some one else will take this 'ere stage to Independence."

"Start 'em off, Bill!" cried a soldier, wearing the uniform of the United-States Infantry. "Don't you let 'em come it over you any longer. I heard last night that your aunt in St. Louis died a couple of weeks ago, and left you five hundred dollars, always provided you called for it in person before the first of August. Rum old lady, that!" continued the speaker reflectively. "But every hour counts, Bill. It's going to be nip and tuck with you anyhow; so cut 'em up, my boy, and go off in a gallop."

"Bill don't care for no money!" exclaimed a deep bass voice belonging to a burly by-stander. "He's raked up about all the cash there was in the camp, playing monte. His pockets is just lined with doubloons and eagles, and two hundred dollars of 'em was mine. He's going on a weddin' tower when he gets to the States."

"Yes: he's got a girl in Independence, sure," cried a second teamster, who stood on the outskirts of the crowd, cutting with his whip at the beetles that ran about in the sand. "He promised to marry her on the twenty-ninth of July; and, if he don't get there in time, she's a-goin' to take up with Jim Baylor. Jim's a man of his word, he is; and he's got just the prettiest ranch near Vegas as ever I seed. He don't drive no stage for a livin', nor play monte either, always to win."

A loud burst of laughter at the driver's expense greeted this sally, and the speaker looked about him with a smile of satisfaction.

"If you come inside the reach of this whip," cried the former, white with rage, "I'll give you something to remember me by until I come back, and then I'll smash your darned ugly mug. You'll find out then that I'm a man of my word too."

"So it's a gal, after all," remarked the soldier calmly, while a fresh burst of noisy laughter broke from the crowd. "And to see how that same Bill led off in the fandango last night with Juanita! no wonder he's in a hurry. He wants to get to Independence before his gal hears of his goin's on in Santa Fe. But it's no use. He can't do it with them horses. I'll go my pile on Jim Baylor and his ranch."

"You will, will you?" roared the driver, roused to the highest pitch of anger, "you d—d, wallowing, lazy dough-boy! I'll just settle your hash now!" He flung down the reins, and prepared to descend hastily from his lofty seat. Just as he placed his foot on the wheel, the stage-agent ran forward, and detained him.

"Hold on, Bill, none of that now!" he exclaimed in an undertone. "Here they are at last!"

As he spoke, a carriage drove up to the *portal*; and three ladies, descending from it, remained standing for a moment on the sidewalk. They were dressed alike in plain black, and long crape veils concealed their faces. The crowd, which had become suddenly silent, gave way respectfully, especially the military portion of it. Then the stage-door was opened; and, without a word, the ladies quickly entered the vehicle, taking the places reserved for them.

One of the passengers, a little girl apparently nine or ten years of age, who had been clinging tightly to a gentleman sitting beside her, raised her large eyes to his. "O papa!" she exclaimed, "I was so afraid they were going to fight. But now the ladies have come, and they will not quarrel any more."

The gentleman assented, drawing the child still closer to him. Bill Taylor, contenting himself with shaking his fist at his military opponent, who replied by the equally expressive gesture of pulling down the corner of his left eye, gathered up the reins; while his assistant took his place on the box.

Then, with three cheers from the crowd, and a crack from Bill's long whip, rendered more emphatic by the state of his mind, the horses sprang forward with the stage, followed by the light wagon containing the luggage and provisions.

On they went, past the unimposing cathedral, and out of the *plaza* along the narrow road which, owing to its high *adobe* walls, allows no view of the surrounding country to be obtained. The dust rose in thick clouds as the long, lumbering conveyance, with its tender, the wagon, dashed on. Dogs barked; and dirty Mexican children, and equally dirty women, rushed to the doors of their huts, to catch a parting glimpse of the vehicles.

Presently, however, all habitations were left behind; and our travellers found themselves out on the desolate plain, upon which no sign of vegetation was visible, save the faded, stunted grass, with here and there a small plant or bush rising above it.

CHAPTER IX.

OUR LADY OF GUADALOUPE.

“Voilà où vous en êtes, vous autres ; vous croyez que le même bonheur est fait pour tous. Quelle étrange vision.” — DIDÉROT.

THE convent of Our Lady of Guadalupe was by far the most elegant and dignified structure of which Sante Fe could boast. To be sure, it was built of *adobe*, like the rest of the houses ; and it could lay claim to no exterior decoration : but it was two stories high ; the gilt cross surmounting its roof was larger than that which ornamented the cathedral ; and extensive grounds surrounded the building, which was hidden, in a measure, from the profane gaze of the outside world by high, massive walls, painted red. In the garden quite a luxuriant vegetation was visible, and the Superior herself might sometimes be seen anxiously inspecting the growth of the roses and geraniums. Masses of brilliant flowers peeped from between the tall spires of grass, while the atmosphere was far purer than that which pervaded the dirty streets. A broad path, bordered on each side with crimson carnations, which cast their spicy fragrance in all directions, led from the tall iron gate, facing the thoroughfare outside, to the convent-door ; and in front of this entrance a fountain splashed lazily into a marble basin.

Within, the rooms were furnished with a severe simplicity, as befitted the abode of those who had renounced the

world and the flesh. With the exception of the refectory, the reception-parlor, and the Superior's room, they each contained a small iron bedstead, a plain wooden table, and two chairs. Over the bed hung a crucifix; and, in another part of the room, an unframed portrait of the Madonna was nailed against the wall. A basin filled with holy water was fastened to each door, and surmounted by a cross.

It was to one of these cheerless rooms that Cordelia had been consigned on the day preceding Miss Héricourt's departure for France. Padre Lamont had attended to all the necessary arrangements for the girl's removal, and, in so doing, had felt, unconsciously, something more than the mere gratification of serving a friend. He was happier and more composed than he had been for some time, but attributed this sense of well-being to the occupation of the moment, which he imagined turned his mind from the contemplation of self to another and more disinterested point. He did not perceive that the mere fact of this being the case was but another and stronger proof of his infatuation. As yet, he was not aware of how completely his identity had merged itself with that of Cordelia; being confident of his moral strength, and glorying in his self-knowledge and his power of self-government. Much earnest study, indeed, had been required, in order to discover his precise condition; but, now that he had found it, he proceeded calmly and deliberately to better it. The struggle had been a fierce one, and yet he had conquered. Many times, with an emotion that amounted nearly to ecstasy, his whole soul had gone out in a prayer of fervent thankfulness. His desire to remain faithful to his trust had overcome his weakness and irresolution, and gradually the shadows which had darkened his mind were one by one removed.

Paul Lamont's character was a strange mixture of pas-

sion and stoicism. At times indifferent, almost callous, at others vehement and zealous, he presented in himself an extraordinary contradiction. He had entered the priesthood at an early age, resolving to devote his entire life to God's service. Earthly love he had hitherto looked upon as a passion not by any means to be entertained by a strong nature in which intellect predominated. He had likewise little respect for those who yielded to any feeling for the sake of temporary gratification, and, being endowed with much force of will himself, had that utter contempt for weakness which only those who have never been in the presence of temptation display. And, in the beginning of his career as a spiritual adviser, he had constantly manifested toward the shortcomings of others the merciless criticism which youth alone is apt to call forth. A man who lacked the strength necessary to overcome a habit or a sentiment was, in his opinion, a despicable object; and this, perhaps, had been the greatest fault in Lamont's character. Since he had met Cordelia Héricourt his views, though intrinsically unchanged, had been modified to some extent. Having at last battled with temptation in one of its worst forms, he could look with more tolerance upon the deficiencies of mankind in general, even when the struggle for redemption was feeble or unsuccessful. The ordeal through which he had just passed, with so much agony, had given to his nature the touch of humanity which it required for its development into higher excellence, and had served, also, to bring forth many latent qualities which he did not dream he possessed. Looking back upon it all, he did not regret the conflict. His good sense and elevated mind brought before him many things which otherwise might have escaped his penetration, or revealed themselves when too late to admit of a remedy.

Two or three days passed by uneventfully after Miss Héricourt's departure. Padre Lamont had not deemed it

advisable to see Cordelia at once, — why, he could hardly have told, except, perhaps, that the delirium which still continued cut off all hope of recognition on her part. She had been placed under the care of Sister Josefa, and instructions had been left with the Superior that he should be sent for in case any sudden change for the worse were to occur.

One morning as he sat sipping his coffee, and trying at the same time to fix his attention upon a book beside him, a note was brought to him from the convent. As he opened it, he became conscious of a vague feeling of apprehension; and he laid the sheet down for a moment irresolutely. When he finally unfolded it, and read the contents, it was with a sense of surprise and pleasure. Sister Josefa wrote to say that Cordelia was quite composed and rational once more, and had expressed her desire to Dr. Baldwin that Padre Lamont should come to see her. A postscript in the Superior's handwriting was added to the note, stating that as yet Cordelia knew nothing of the circumstances attending her removal to the convent, and that all thought it advisable for the priest to acquaint her with the particulars, as he represented the intimate friend of the family.

It would be difficult to describe Padre Lamont's varied emotions as he read these lines. A feeling of joy, so intense that it almost startled him, rose suddenly within his breast. For a while he sat gazing fixedly at the note as if in doubt of its reality: then, rising quickly, he tossed his book aside, and, taking his hat, went out into the street.

It was a perfect summer morning. The sky was a deep, cloudless blue, and the air soft and delicious. In the distance rose the same low range of hills that the priest had watched from Cordelia's window a few days ago, but a delicate violet mist now enveloped them instead of the sunset hues of scarlet and gold. The street along which

he walked was bordered on each side by trees covered with pale pink blossoms, which, as the breeze swayed them, fell at his feet in a rosy shower.

In the broad *plaza* Mexicans of all ages were seated on the ground. The men lazily smoked their cigarettes. The women conversed in drawling accents, or else slept. There was the reckless indolence about the whole scene which is typical of Mexican life. The children, nearly all of them naked, alone showed any signs of vitality. They ran about, collecting dirt and pebbles, which they threw at one another with shrill cries of delight; their slight, erect forms and bronzed skins looking effective against the background of brilliant color formed by the dresses of the others.

As the priest passed by, they all greeted him, displaying a momentary animation. He paused for a moment to speak to one or two in his low, courteous tone, and then continued his way toward the convent, which was but a short distance off.

One of the sisters admitted him; and, after a short delay, he was shown to Cordelia's room. A strange sense of trepidation overcame him as he crossed the threshold, and penetrated the semi-obscurity. Sister Josefa, a tall, graceful woman, rose from her seat, and advanced to meet him. He uttered a few words to her, going toward the bed as he did so, with a look of anxious inquiry. Cordelia lay with her face to the wall, but at the sound of the priest's voice she turned quickly. She looked white and thin; and a dull, heavy expression was in her eyes. As she held out her hand with a faint smile, he started forward, clasping it eagerly in his.

"Cordelia!" he exclaimed hurriedly. He strove to say something more, but the words refused to come. Presently he succeeded in regaining his voice. "You are better," he said, with forced calmness.

"Yes, much better, father. But my head is still weak, and I feel exhausted."

Sister Josefa left the room softly, whispering to the priest that Dr. Baldwin had said his patient must not talk too long.

When she had gone, Padre Lamont seated himself by the bedside. "You have much to tell me, Cordelia," he said, in a tone of reflection. "Is it not so?"

"It is rather you who have much to tell me, I think, father," she replied, in some astonishment. "What has happened, and why am I in this place? Sister Josefa and the Superior say I have been ill; and, indeed, this must be true, for I feel so weak and languid. But why am I not at home with my aunt, and where is she?" Her voice trembled a little as she put the question, and she looked searchingly into the priest's face.

He felt that he had a difficult task before him, and one requiring great tact and delicacy; but he resolved to acquit himself of it as speedily and easily as possible.

"I must go back a little, my child, in order that you may understand it all," he said. "Do you remember," he added, after a second's reflection, "a visit I paid you one evening not very long ago? You told me then of a fortune you had just inherited, and of your desire to devote it and yourself to God's service." He hesitated again, as the recollection of that evening occurred to him, and he recalled the feelings associated with it. "That same night," he continued gently, "you were taken ill, and have remained so ever since. Of course, the project of going to France was thus indefinitely postponed; or, rather, it would have been, had not a conversation held by you with Mrs. Aldergrove caused other arrangements to be made. You told her, you remember, that, in case any thing should happen to prevent your going, you would like your cousins to take your aunt abroad. Mrs. Aldergrove"—

"Pardon me, father," interrupted Cordelia, "but you are mistaken there. I never mentioned the matter to Mrs. Aldergrove, nor held any conversation whatever with her."

Padre Lamont's face expressed deep astonishment.

"Are you sure of that?" he asked. "You may possibly forget."

"No, I forget nothing, father. I spoke of the money to no one except you and my aunt."

There was a pause. Each seemed desirous of saying something which neither had the courage to utter.

"Miss Héricourt is weak," said the priest presently, "and easily led by others. But let me go on with the story as it should be told. Mrs. Aldergrove insisted that such an arrangement had been made by you; and, as you could not be appealed to, there was no way of verifying her statement. We were obliged, therefore, to take her word for it. What her motive could have been in thus misrepresenting the truth, I cannot imagine, unless"— He checked himself abruptly, and for a few moments did not speak. "Miss Héricourt," he added finally, "objected to the plan of going abroad without you; and Dr. Baldwin and myself sought to persuade her to remain firm in this opinion. But of what use could our influence be to her while your cousins were in the house? In spite of my protestations, she decided at last to accompany them, and endeavor to procure the money unaided. She left Santa Fe a week ago with the Aldergroves, who, however, will leave her at Havre, and make a tour of the Continent. You were brought here before their departure."

He paused, and for some time there was silence between them. Then Cordelia extended her hand, and laid it gently on his arm.

"I have no friend, it seems, but you," she said, speaking with difficulty. "Those who should have been my friends have forsaken me when I had most need of them." Her

eyes filled with tears, but she brushed them impatiently away. "Pray with me," she said, "pray with me, father. There are thoughts in my mind which must not stay there."

Notwithstanding this, there was in her tone a resignation which brought forcibly before the priest the nobility and strength of her character. He had expected to find her amazed and indignant at her aunt's cruel desertion and her cousins' falsehood, but the calmness and fortitude with which she received the intelligence excited both his respect and his admiration. He looked earnestly at her; an uncontrollable emotion sweeping through his whole frame as a moment later he fell upon his knees by the bedside, and a fervent prayer escaped his lips. By degrees, the full sense of the situation was lost to him; and he became conscious that his supplication was again a fierce appeal to be delivered from temptation. Once, his gaze meeting Cordelia's, he saw her eyes fixed upon him with a sort of bewildered fascination, in which a touch of alarm lingered. He stopped abruptly, feeling, in so doing, the blood rush to his face. Cordelia's hand, whitened and transparent in consequence of her illness, lay on the coverlet of the bed. For a second he hesitated, and turned irresolutely away. Then, with a sudden impetuous gesture, he clasped it in his, and kissed it passionately.

Cordelia started; and her face, so pale a moment before, now flushed scarlet. "Ah," she cried, withdrawing her hand, "not you, too, — not you!" Tears choked her utterance; and, before she could speak again, he had risen, and dashed from the room.

She lay back upon her pillow, weak and trembling; the tears rolling unheeded down her cheeks, and falling upon the hand which the priest had pressed to his lips, as if to remove the stain which rested there. A sense of painful loneliness overcame her now for the first time. Her last

support had been taken from her, for henceforth friendship between herself and Padre Lamont would be impossible. He had been all to her, — priest, guide, brother ; and now he could be neither the one nor the other. She remained alone, with a heart more heavy and sorrowful than it had ever been before, her sense of oppression intensified, perhaps, by her weak physical condition ; but the latent heroism in her nature came forth at her call, and the degradation of self-pity was successfully overcome.

As for Padre Lamont, he went home filled with horror and indignation against himself. What had he done? In a moment of ungovernable emotion he had raised an impassable barrier between himself and the woman he loved, for he no longer denied that he loved her. He sat motionless in his study for several hours, overwhelming himself with bitter reproaches, rendered more severe by the consciousness of how powerless he was to overcome the feelings which swayed him. Either he must renounce forever this unlucky passion, or else begin life afresh, and under other auspices. At this last thought a blush of shame rose to his cheeks. He despised himself thoroughly ; for his moral strength, his one hope of salvation, had failed him at the moment when he most needed it. He could have found some relief once more in earnest prayer, and yet he dared not pray. The mere mention of God's name now seemed to him a profanation.

By and by, however, he grew calmer, and took counsel with himself upon the course of action easiest to pursue. Which would be the greater trial, — to renounce the priesthood, or to continue as he was? It was not the first time that the possibility of either had occurred to him. Often he had wondered whether or not his calling had been judiciously chosen, and whether a nature such as his could find permanent satisfaction in the life he led.

Of all the struggles he had been called upon to bear,

this was surely the most terrible. There are moments when the noblest minds not only turn away in perplexity from communion with self, but find no human intercourse of any profit. This was the case with Padre Lamont. What should he do? Whither should he go in order to discover what path it would be most fitting for him to take? What availed him now all former experiences?

When he rose to retire for the night, he was exhausted, both mentally and physically; but his reflections had not been without issue. He resolved to go to the Bishop, put the facts of the case before him, and announce his determination to cast off the vows which, but a short time before, had been his sole consolation.

CHAPTER X.

MRS. ALDERGROVE'S SUGGESTION.

“There are, therefore, situations from which nothing but solitude and retirement can relieve us. For this reason it is frequently necessary that those whom melancholy affects should be left alone.” — ZIMMERMANN : *Essay on Solitude*.

THE stage in which our friends were travelling across the plains contained ten persons, arranged from the front, backward, as follows : —

On the first seat were the driver, — Bill Taylor, — and his assistant, John Hill. Professor Hoveden and Mr. Glatz occupied the second seat. On the third were Dr. Heyward, a young Boston physician, holding some government position in Santa Fe, and now on his way home ; and Mr. Robert Fielding, a merchant of New York. On the fourth seat sat Mrs. Aldergrove and Castaly Fielding, the little girl who was so apprehensive of danger just before the stage started. On the fifth and last seat were Miss Héricourt and Margaret.

The stage itself was built somewhat after the pattern of the ambulance wagons then used in the army. The seats were covered with dark green leather, and supplied with well-cushioned backs, so arranged that they could be folded forward, allowing the passengers to get to their places readily. The rear seat, however, was constructed somewhat differently from the rest. The back, instead of being a cushioned rail like the others, was nearly two feet

in height, and was attached to the seat by means of hinges. It was further kept in position by stout leather straps, buckled to the front of the cushion upon which the occupants sat. When these straps were unfastened, the back fell down like a swinging-door. Properly adjusted, however, it formed a portion of the rear of the stage; and above it was a curtain attached to the top of the vehicle, and below to the swinging-back, by light straps and buckles.

It is necessary to be particular upon these points, even at the risk of exhausting the reader's patience; for the details just recorded are of material consequence to the full comprehension of the extraordinary events which subsequently happened.

The luggage-wagon followed the stage at the average distance of fifty yards. It contained the passengers' trunks, provisions, cooking utensils, and three small tents, one of the latter being for the use of the ladies, another for the Professor, Glatz, and Dr. Heyward, the third for Mr. Fielding and his little daughter. The wagon was driven by a certain Thomas Wall; and his assistant was no other than the Mexican, Jesus Maria, whom we have already seen on a former occasion heading the procession of devout supplicants for rain.

The four men, drivers and assistants, were thoroughly accustomed to frontier life under all its aspects; and in other respects they were quite equal to the various duties required by their positions. Not only were they obliged to look after the horses, do the cooking, pitch the tents, and perform any other trifling services that might be necessary, but they were likewise forced to keep a good lookout against Indians, and surprises from the foe. Hence they took turns at standing guard at night. This latter duty was always discharged with true military strictness, which was very proper; as it was by no means an

unusual event for larger parties than the present one to be cut off by some wandering band of Apaches or Navajos.

Professor Hoveden, under whose charge the ladies were, had been in Santa Fe for some time, examining a gold-mine in the neighborhood. An intimate acquaintance had sprung up between him and Major Héricourt ; and, hearing through Mrs. Aldergrove that Miss Héricourt and her niece were on their way to the United States, he had announced to them his own intention to go at the same time, although he knew them but slightly.

It must be admitted, that the presence of ladies was something of a restraint upon the other passengers. Ordinarily a party of this kind spent the day in singing humorous songs, relating piquant anecdotes, smoking an unlimited number of pipes, and imbibing liberal potations of whiskey and brandy.

On the present occasion, however, the stage had travelled many miles before any one undertook to converse with his neighbor, either aloud or in a whisper ; and no one, as yet, had ventured to commit the indiscretion of lighting a pipe. In fact, for over an hour not an observation had been made by any one of the passengers ; and an expression of settled gloom began to make itself evident upon the faces of the masculine portion, with the exception of that of the Professor, who, with a treatise upon geology held closely to his eyes, seemed lost to his surroundings.

It is true, that little Castaly's gentle tones has been heard now and then in the beginning of the journey ; but her remarks were mostly questions about objects near by, and were replied to by such short, abrupt answers from Mr. Fielding, that the child soon relapsed into silence. Occasionally an animal with very long ears, elegantly termed a jackass rabbit, would dart out in alarm from beneath some bush, and spring across the road directly in

front of the horses' feet; and, again, a prairie-wolf, or coyote, might be seen skulking away from the vicinity. But, beyond the appearance of these creatures, there was little to attract the attention. As for the ladies, they were as silent as the men. They sat with their veils down, taking no interest apparently in their fellow-travellers, or in the surrounding country.

A halt of about half an hour was made at noon, that the horses might be fed, and the passengers allowed to eat a light dinner. The men descended from the vehicle with the utmost haste. They stretched their legs with satisfaction, then lighted their pipes, and endeavored to refresh themselves with a slice of ham and some "hard-tack," as the army biscuit is appropriately called, washed down with such spirituous liquor as each had seen fit to provide for his comfort.

It was at the conclusion of this homely meal, that the Professor, not without some trepidation, approached the rear of the stage for the purpose of renewing his offers of assistance. Addressing Mrs. Aldergrove, whom he evidently mistook for Miss Héricourt, he expressed in a few words his desire to be of service to them.

"You are very kind," she replied in a low tone, "but we shall require little. We are provided with all possible comforts, and we are used to travelling."

"But you must be sure to let me know if I can do any thing for you," said the Professor, glancing at her from over his spectacles. "We have a long journey before us, and I fear you will be tired before we get to the end of it. Your niece, certainly, will suffer; for I think you told me she had been ill."

"Doubtless, we shall all suffer," said Mrs. Aldergrove in a resigned tone. "I am afraid we shall not be very companionable: our great sorrow is so recent. that you will, I am sure, pardon in advance any apparent incivility

on our part. In the mean time, let me thank you again for your kindness."

The Professor bowed, and was turning away, when she spoke again.

"I am sure," she said gravely, "that we are a great hinderance to your enjoyment. And, indeed," she continued, after a moment's deliberation, "the odor of tobacco is exceedingly unpleasant to us. Could you not arrange to have a curtain of some kind put up, so as to separate us from the other passengers? If that could be done, you would feel at liberty to talk and smoke, while we should have greater privacy."

The Professor's pale face brightened perceptibly.

"A very excellent suggestion," he said, smiling. "I will speak to Taylor about it immediately. He has, no doubt, some tarpaulin or rug that will answer the purpose. I only see one objection; and that is, that Mr. Fielding will be separated from his little girl. However, I will gladly take Hill's place beside the driver. Hill can easily go in the other wagon, and the doctor can move into my place. In this way, Mr. Fielding can have the little one beside him, and the last two seats will be entirely for your party."

"Oh! if you could make that arrangement, professor, we should be greatly indebted to you," exclaimed Mrs. Aldergrove. "It will suit us admirably, and will not, I trust, inconvenience any one."

It was not very long before Bill Taylor was at work, everybody in the stage having given a ready consent to have the curtain put up. Mr. Fielding was especially gratified at the idea of having Castaly beside him.

In a few moments, therefore, the matter was settled. A large buffalo robe was hung up, forming a separate compartment for the ladies, and making them as completely isolated as they would have been in another vehicle. Pipes could now be smoked *ad libitum*, drinks taken unobserved

by feminine eyes, and even some not very delicate songs sung without the ears of any one being offended.

"I am glad to be with you, papa," said little Castaly. "I don't like those queer ladies."

"By Jove!" cried Glatz, perceiving with satisfaction how admirably the new arrangement worked. "That Miss Héricourt has more sense than all of us put together. Nearly as much, in fact, as my wife."

As for the ladies, no sooner was the stage under way again, than they raised their veils.

"Did you observe that the Professor mistook you for me?" asked Miss Héricourt, "and also that he seemed to think Margaret was Cordelia? How droll! was it not? Still," she added, "I am perfectly willing that he should continue to do so. Margaret is Cordelia, you are me, and I am you. We will mystify them to the end if you do not mind. I dote on mysteries, especially under such circumstances as the present. They provide pleasing excitement to the mind oppressed by sorrow." And Miss Héricourt rolled her eyes towards the roof of the stage, and relapsed into an expressive silence.

Mrs. Aldergrove assented calmly, but Margaret said nothing. From the beginning of the journey she had sat silent, lost, to all appearance, in deep reflection, and unconscious of what was passing around her.

CHAPTER XI.

PROFESSOR HOVEDEN IS TROUBLED.

“Two voices are there.”

So rapidly did Bill Taylor drive his horses, that shortly after sunset he brought the stage to a small mountain brook within a mile of Tecalote. A halt was to be made here for the night, it being thought preferable to going on to the miserable little Mexican village. The tents were accordingly pitched, and preparations made for the evening meal. The men had at once left the stage, but Mrs. Aldergrove announced that she and the other ladies would remain where they were until the tent should be quite ready. When the arrangements were finally completed, Professor Hoveden went forward to escort them to the shelter they were to occupy. Before he had gone half the short distance, however, the back of the stage was let down, the curtain raised; and the three ladies, still closely veiled, descended to the ground. As the Professor approached, Mrs. Aldergrove advanced slightly to meet him, being urged thereto by a sign from Margaret.

“I hope you will not put yourself to the inconvenience of looking after us,” she said. “It is not necessary. We are quite able to take care of ourselves in all such trivial matters as are likely to occur during the journey. If any danger should arise, we shall be grateful for your kind assistance and protection; but otherwise we prefer to be

entirely independent. Of course, our position is not a pleasant one at best ; but it will be less embarrassing if we are left free to move about without notice from the other passengers."

"Certainly, Miss Héricourt," replied the Professor, still mistaking her for that lady. "You will, of course, do as you please in regard to the matter. I should not have presumed to offer my services had I not supposed they would be acceptable to you." He spoke with both surprise and mortification in his tone.

"Oh ! pray do not think I am unmindful of your kindness," said Mrs. Aldergrove hastily. "But, indeed, professor, I hardly know what I am doing. My brother's death was so sudden—so awful—so"—She was at a loss for an adjective forcible enough to express the great calamity which had befallen her: so she said calmly, "I am not myself, Professor Hoveden, not myself at all; and as for my niece Cordelia,"—lowering her voice to a whisper, while Margaret and Miss Héricourt walked arm in arm toward the tent,— "she has hardly spoken a word since her unfortunate father was buried, nor has she recovered from her recent severe illness. My cousin, Mrs. Aldergrove, as you have doubtless seen, is greatly shaken in mind, partly from the fact, no doubt, that her daughter has preferred to remain behind in Santa Fe, rather than accompany us. But, besides this, my brother's death was such a blow to us, that I am amazed to find we are not all deranged."

"Naturally, your grief must be overwhelming; and I am not surprised that you seek retirement," said the Professor with grave politeness. "Let me assure you that your wishes shall be religiously respected by all of us."

"Thank you. I knew you would understand. Will you kindly tell the other gentlemen the cause of our unsociability, and ask them to bear with us in our great affliction ?

My poor brother was every thing to me and to his desolate daughter. I never expect to see a smile on Cordelia's lips again."

"Oh! I hope it will not be so bad as that," said the Professor. "And now, good-night, Miss Héricourt. Should you want me, you know where I am to be found."

Mrs. Aldergrove bade him good-night, and turned in the direction of the tent, which Miss Héricourt and Margaret had already entered.

Professor Hoveden joined the other passengers.

"It is very remarkable," he said, as he lighted a cigar, and strolled away over the prairie with Mr. Glatz. "It is without exception the most extraordinary thing I ever saw, and my life has not been an uneventful one. When I engaged places in the stage for these women, at the request of one of them, — this very Miss Héricourt, I think, — she appeared gratified at the idea of having some one to look after her during the journey; and now she seems almost insulted by my offer to help her in her loneliness. I cannot understand it."

"Then, you don't know women, Professor," said Glatz, with emphasis. "Why, there's my wife, now. She changes her mind twenty times a day; but it's all right, I suppose. She's a woman, and she can't help it. Miss Héricourt is a woman too."

"Yes, very likely," said the Professor reflectively. "But somehow she does not appear as she did when I saw her just after the major's death. She was very weak then, and seemed to need protection; but now it is quite otherwise. I have heard it said, that some women grow strong when responsibility is forced upon them; and it is therefore possible, that having her niece and that half-crazed cousin in charge, makes her overdo things a little, especially as she is surrounded by none but men."

"In regard to that," said Glatz, knocking the ashes from

his pipe, "my wife is a notable example of the truth of your theory. You should have seen her, Professor, when the house caught fire. We all got out safe, but I found that I had left my coat hanging over the back of a chair. It was a cold night; and I stood shivering on the sidewalk, watching the flames as they consumed my house. Suddenly I started back to get that coat. 'Where are you going, Glatz?' asked my wife. 'My dear,' I replied, 'I left my coat hanging over a chair.' Well, I never got any farther than that, for she seized me by the arm. 'Glatz,' she cried, 'you are a Dutch fool!' and with that she gave me a jerk that sent me half-way across the street. Before I knew where I was, the roof fell in. Now, wasn't it lucky that I didn't go for the coat? I objected to being called Dutch, though," continued Glatz with a sigh. "I came here when I was fourteen, and that's just thirty years ago. And I am not Dutch, either."

The two men walked along in silence for a while, the one puffing vigorously away at his cigar, the other at his pipe. Presently the Professor stopped abruptly, and faced his companion.

"Glatz," he said earnestly, "did you ever see Miss Héricourt or her niece?"

"Oh, yes! a hundred times."

"Did you ever hear either of them speak?"

"I've heard the major's sister speak frequently. She has often been in our store."

"Did you hear her talking to me a little while ago?" inquired the Professor, dropping his voice.

"No, I didn't catch a word. You were too far off."

"Well, I have heard Miss Héricourt talk often, and"—he hesitated, and looked Glatz full in the face inquiringly.

"What of it?" exclaimed the other. "What are you driving at, Professor?"

"Nothing, only it struck me that a sudden change has taken place in her voice."

"Why, my dear sir, that's of no consequence," cried Glatz, with a laugh. "My wife's voice changes a dozen times a day. Women," he continued, assuming a dignified air, "have certain tones for certain things. When they have no responsibility, for instance, their voices are soft and gentle, like the turtle-dove's; but when responsibility is thrust upon them, — well, you ought to hear my wife then, that's all."

"The difference is possible," said the Professor calmly. "But why do not those other women raise their veils? The niece and cousin, I mean."

"Now, Professor, how the devil do I know? Don't all women in mourning keep their veils down, except when they have a special reason for raising them? When my wife's sister died she did not lift her veil for eighteen months."

"If she was dead, how could she?" said the Professor, with unconscious solemnity.

"I mean my wife, of course," answered the other; "and I will tell you why women cultivate this habit. In the first place, it's the fashion to wear veils down; and it allows you to think, moreover, that the women beneath them are looking mournful, or, perhaps, weeping. This, of course, excites sympathy; and sympathy is what women live on. Did you ever see the woman, Professor, who did not crave sympathy? My dear sir, she does not exist."

The Professor made no reply. He walked on, with his grave face unusually thoughtful in expression. They turned in a few moments to go back to the camp. It was already quite dark, but the large fire which had been kindled served as a beacon to guide them. Its ruddy flame could be seen in the distance, illuminating the obscurity. The stillness was oppressive; and the chill air which al-

ways comes in that region with the setting sun, even in midsummer, caused the two men to quicken their steps. They were hungry besides, and they could see by the fire-light that supper was being prepared.

When they passed by the ladies' tent, it was tightly closed. A light, however, was burning within ; and the shadows of the three women could be seen upon the canvas, as they sat at the camp-table, eating their evening meal. Professor Hoveden listened as he walked quietly by, but not a sound was to be heard. He stood for an instant watching abstractedly the exaggerated reflections cast upon the tent-wall ; and, as he did so, a sudden movement struck him as being unlike the others. One of the women raised her hands, and then clasped them over her face with a sound like a sob. Half ashamed of himself, he hastened after Glatz, who had already filled his plate with fried beef, of which he was partaking voraciously.

An hour later all were asleep, except the two men on guard and Margaret Aldergrove.

CHAPTER XII.

MARGARET DOES HER DUTY.

“Deeds, not words.”

AT a little before sunrise the next morning our travelers were eating their breakfast; and, when that not very inviting meal was disposed of, they were again on their journey. Bill Taylor expected to pass Las Vegas early in the afternoon, and to camp about twenty miles beyond. To do this, it was necessary to be expeditious, and to push the horses to their utmost. After passing Las Vegas, no more settlements were to be made until Fort Atkinson should be reached. It was Taylor's intention to remain in camp until nine o'clock that evening, and then, starting once more, make an all-night journey to Utah Creek. This course was imperative in order to avoid meeting with the bands of Indians which abounded in this wild region. Only a month before, the stage had been attacked while passing through this very tract of country. The men belonging to the unfortunate party were killed, and the women carried into captivity.

On this occasion all went well. The camp was reached in due time, the horses and passengers refreshed; and punctually at nine o'clock, with the full moon shining overhead, the stage and its attendant wagon were once more on their way.

It was the custom for first one and then the other vehi-

cle to take the lead on alternate days. At present the wagon was in front, and the stage scarcely fifty yards behind.

The usual laughing and talking went on for some time among the gentlemen in the front division of the stage. But little by little, as one after the other composed himself to sleep with as much comfort as was possible under the circumstances, the conversation languished, and finally ceased altogether. Even Bill Taylor's vigorous ejaculations to the horses were gradually discontinued. The animals seemed to know that good work was expected from them; for they kept steadily on in a swinging trot, which did not relax for a moment, and carried the stage over the smooth prairie-road at the rate of seven miles an hour.

In the rear compartment scarcely a word was spoken. Miss Héricourt had already settled herself to sleep; and to judge by her heavy breathing, which, however, was imperfectly heard through the shawls enveloping her head and face, she had fully succeeded in accomplishing her object.

Margaret, it will be remembered, sat on the back seat with her cousin; while Mrs. Aldergrove occupied the front one by herself.

Sleep was very far from the eyes of these two ladies. Now and then a low whisper passed from one to the other. Margaret had only to lean forward a little, to bring her lips in close contact with her mother's ear.

"There will never be another such opportunity," she said presently. "Shall we let it slip by unheeded?"

"I am afraid, — terribly afraid," said Mrs. Aldergrove. "It is an awful thing; and, if she should cry out, we should be discovered." She turned her head toward the buffalo-robe, as though to make sure that no one was listening. "I tremble, Margaret," she added: "my strength fails me."

"There will never be another such opportunity," repeated Margaret slowly, and with emphasis. "Think, mother, of the wretched lives we lead, and the prospect before us. Think, also, of the change in our positions which money can give us. Look at this woman," she continued, with a gesture in the direction of Miss Héricourt: "she has but a few years yet to live. She is of no use in the world, nor has she the capability of making herself useful. Besides, if she gets the money, will it not go to found a Romish convent,—a house devoted to the service of antichrist?"

"Yes, yes," assented Mrs. Aldergrove. "I do not say, Margaret, that any act performed to divert the money from so unholy a cause would not be a righteous one. Still, I am afraid,—more afraid than ever in my life before."

"There is always a tendency in our minds to see good in actions by which we are benefited," said Margaret, after a pause. "But I have looked at the matter calmly, and, I think, disinterestedly. I know that the act we contemplate would be in every way a righteous one. But I went over all this with you last night, mother; and even before leaving Santa Fe we spoke of it, as you know. This is no time for argument. Go to sleep if you will, or at least shut your eyes, and leave the matter to me."

"Go to sleep!" said Mrs. Aldergrove. "No, I cannot do that. I shall share your danger, whatever it may be. But, O Margaret! are you quite sure you are right? What if you should fail?"

"I shall not fail," said Margaret firmly. "You have heard, mother, of inspirations from Heaven granted to certain persons for special causes. Such an inspiration has been sent to me. I shall obey the impulse, and soon, at that. You cannot help me. All that I ask is, that you will keep perfectly quiet, no matter what you may see or hear."

"God help you, Margaret, God help you!" said Mrs. Aldergrove reverently. "I believe you are right. The money must not aid in spreading Romish errors over the country. Yes," she added, after a moment's reflection, "it is clearly our duty to obtain it. It is God's will."

"Listen," said Margaret, bending forward, and speaking hurriedly. "You must remain perfectly still, as though you were sound asleep. Do not look at me, and then you will never know how it was done. The responsibility will be mine, — all mine; and the glory or the shame, whichever it may be, will rest on me."

Mrs. Aldergrove obeyed. She turned her face in the opposite direction, and closed her eyes. All was silent, save for the noise made by the horses' hoofs and the heavy rumbling of the vehicle. Margaret sat for a moment as if plunged in thought: then she rose gently, and gazed earnestly upon the sleeping form of Miss Héricourt, whose breathing was deep and regular. The girl's hands did not tremble; nor was any emotion displayed by her except, perhaps, in the tightly compressed lips, always with her the indication of intense feeling. Miss Héricourt's features, never very strong in cast, looked now particularly childish, as she half reclined, half sat, in the corner, and in her sleep partly uncovered her face, unconscious of that cold gaze riveted upon her. A breath of air blowing across the prairie, and made stronger by the quick motion of the stage, shook the curtain back and forth, and warned Margaret that delay was dangerous. Yet she stood still, looking at her cousin, her eyes now filled with the terror of uncertainty. Oh for strength to do the deed quickly! How many moments had already passed! and Miss Héricourt, her lips parted in a vague smile, the muscles of her face relaxed, slept steadily on, never stirring.

Mrs. Aldergrove, cowering on the cushion, her hands tightly pressed to her ears, shivered as if with cold. Would

the end never come? What end? For what did she wait? Surely it was no reality, this stern, horrible vision which rose up before her. Miss Héricourt peacefully sleeping, and Margaret — no, no, it was not possible. If she could only remove her hands from her ears to hear, and turn round to see, what was taking place behind her, then this dream, born of the night and her own unhealthy fancy, would vanish, as the gray morning mist fades beneath the sun's crimson rays. But she was powerless. Her faculties, her limbs, were paralyzed. Had she become merely a thing — an inanimate creature devoid of will and motion? She could hear nothing, feel nothing, do nothing. And yet, what noise was that which suddenly echoed through the compartment, ringing into the breathless stillness and across the plain? Could it be a human cry? How pitiful, how mournful, it sounded, as it died away in a faint murmur far off! Whether or not it were a human voice, whether real or imaginary, it seemed to recall Mrs. Aldergrove once more to herself. Her arms fell to her side; and, with a terror-stricken expression, she turned slowly round.

"Margaret," she said in a hoarse whisper, "Margaret!" Her clouded brain could at first distinguish nothing; but in a few moments she made out Margaret's form crouching behind her in an attitude of nameless dread, her face buried in both hands.

"Margaret, speak to me," whispered Mrs. Aldergrove in an agonized tone.

There was no answer for some time; but finally the girl raised her head, exposing a white and distorted countenance to her mother's view. "It is all over," she said in a mechanical tone. "But it had to be done: it had to be done."

"Did she cry out, Margaret? I stopped my ears with both hands. I was horribly afraid."

"I do not know — I cannot remember. But it is of little consequence. I hardly think she could have uttered a sound, though ; for her face was muffled in shawls."

They sat for a while in silence. The horses still kept up a steady trot, their hoofs striking the hard road with a metallic sound.

"It was God's will — God's will," said Mrs. Aldergrove presently. "He will provide every means." She seemed to be hardly conscious of what she was saying, and her glance wandered restlessly here and there.

"It was my duty," said Margaret. "Have not others been inspired to commit deeds, which, though apparently wicked and uncalled for, have brought happiness to a chosen few? Cannot I, too, have been inspired?" She rose as she spoke, and rolled up the little curtain at the side of the stage. The moonlight streamed in over Miss Héricourt's empty seat, and seemed to cast thereon a ghostly shadow. It revealed, as well, the pallor of Margaret's features and the horror on Mrs. Aldergrove's, as she sat motionless, with her hands convulsively pressed together.

"Give me my shawl, mother, and I will try to sleep," said Margaret, as she fastened the curtain. "You, too, had better rest ; for to-morrow will be a day requiring all our strength." She threw herself down in a corner of the seat, and, drawing the shawl over her knees, closed her eyes. Mrs. Aldergrove did likewise, and once more silence reigned in the compartment.

Did they sleep, or only feign to do so?

The moonlight gradually waned, casting its last pale rays on the two women, and making their white features look as if the impress of death was upon them. In the empty seat an indefinite presence seemed to linger, and stretch forth appealing arms to the motionless forms sitting with closed eyes, and faces upturned to the dim light.

So the night passed, stealing quietly by, as though the deed it had witnessed had stiffened its footsteps. Would they sleep on until broad day, if indeed Margaret and her mother did sleep?

See, the morning is near at hand. Already a faint rosy flush makes itself visible on the eastern horizon; and, where the moonlight recently entered, a fresh, cool air is blowing into the compartment. Margaret stirs uneasily, and draws her shawl closer about her. Day is beginning to dawn, and illumine the desolate prairie with something like beauty. Here, indeed, but little nature exists to spring into sudden life and warmth at the sun's touch; yet the joy of the new day fills the atmosphere, and remains there.

In a little while Margaret unclosed her eyes, and, bending forward, touched her mother gently on the shoulder.

"The time has come," she said: "do your part."

CHAPTER XIII.

WHERE IS MRS. ALDERGROVE?

“Foul deeds will rise,
Though all the earth o’erwhelm them, to men’s eyes.”

HAMLET.

AT about five o’clock on the morning following the night-journey, the passengers in the front compartment of the stage were roused from their somewhat uncomfortable slumbers by a piercing scream from one of the ladies. Bill Taylor, who, of course, was awake, changed countenance; for the thought of Indians flashed across his mind. He knew how greatly the odds would be against him and his party if the foe had followed the stage, and were about to make an attack. As for the others, they started up, rubbing their half-dazed eyes confusedly. Then each involuntarily grasped his revolver, and prepared to defend himself as best he could. A glance behind the stage and around the prairie, which was now lighted by the sun’s rays, showed Taylor that no Indians were in sight. He drew up the horses, however, bringing the vehicle to a sudden halt, and jumped to the ground, just as a second shriek for help broke the silence. Some of the passengers hastily pulled down the partition which divided the stage, while others hurried to the ladies’ compartment. To the astonishment of all, there were only two ladies to be seen. Mrs. Aldergrove, or Miss Héricourt as she was supposed to be, was sitting bolt upright, her hands clasped convul-

sively, and her whole appearance indicating great agitation. Margaret was bending forward, and closely examining a strap on the opposite side of the stage; while the other lady had disappeared.

As Professor Hoveden made his appearance at the side of the compartment, Margaret turned toward him. It was the first time he had seen her without her veil, nor had he ever spoken to her during the journey. His quick glance noted that she was striving her utmost to subdue the consternation and grief which threatened to overwhelm her.

"How could this have happened?" she asked in a hollow tone. "How could this have happened?"

"What is it? Where is Mrs. Aldergrove?" exclaimed several passengers simultaneously.

"Tell them, Cordelia," said the real Mrs. Aldergrove, covering her eyes with her hands, as though to shut out some horrible vision. "Tell them, for I cannot as yet trust myself to speak of it. My poor, poor cousin!"

"Professor Hoveden," said Margaret with an effort, but speaking calmly and distinctly, "something terrible has happened. You see," she added, pointing to the empty seat, "my cousin, Mrs. Aldergrove, has gone. Where can she be? How did she get out?" She paused, and, leaning forward a little, fixed her eyes upon the Professor's face.

No one replied. All seemed, for the moment, too horrified to speak. Margaret withdrew her glance from the Professor, and allowed it to wander from one to the other of the passengers, as though seeking an explanation.

"I awoke not long ago," she continued with the same calmness, "and saw at once that my cousin's seat was empty. At first I thought my eyes had deceived me. As the curtains were all drawn but one, and the light was dim. I passed my hand over the cushion. It was unoccu-

pied, and quite cold to my touch, as though no one had sat upon it for some time."

In spite of herself her voice faltered a little, but she regained her composure almost instantly.

"The discovery almost stunned me, as you can imagine, gentlemen," she went on after a short pause. "I felt sick and faint; but I had sufficient strength to rouse my aunt, and make her aware of what had occurred. You heard her scream."

She turned aside once more, and examined the strap, as though to discover whether or not it was displaced.

For an instant all seemed to be stricken dumb by the appalling recital. Then a sudden babel of voices rose, each person expressing his feelings and opinions independently of the others.

"It is a horrible thing," said the Professor gravely, when he could make himself heard. "Mrs. Aldergrove is certainly not here; but where can she have gone? It is very mysterious."

"That's so," assented Glatz. "Where the devil can she have gone? I don't think even my wife could answer that question."

"It is very evident that she has fallen out," said Margaret quietly.

"Fallen out!" exclaimed the Professor. "Why, how could she? Don't you see this strap is unbroken, and that it must have formed an effective barrier against any such accident?"

"She could only have done so in one way," said Margaret. "This curtain, I remember, was rolled up last evening to admit the fresh air. My aunt was chilly, and complained a little: but my poor cousin could never endure to be confined, even in a large room; and so we wrapped ourselves in our shawls without further remonstrance. She soon fell asleep in the corner, with nothing

to hold her in but this strap, which is fastened to the back of the seat, as you see. Look, Professor," she continued, again examining it. "It is but a few inches above the cushion, and could have been only a slight obstacle to her falling out."

"If your cousin had ever walked in her sleep, Miss Héricourt," said Dr. Heyward, "I would be inclined to think that she had jumped out while in a state of somnambulism; or she may have awakened suddenly, and got out, not knowing what she was doing. I have known of several such instances. A patient of mine once falling asleep before an open window awoke, apparently under the influence of fear, and jumped out."

"She may have done that, or have got out while in a state of somnambulism," replied Margaret, with a quick glance of relief and satisfaction, which was not unobserved by the Professor, who was closely watching her. "Yes," she continued, "it must have been in some such way. I think I have heard my father say that she has several times walked in her sleep."

"But," cried the Professor hurriedly, "while we stand talking here, the poor lady may be lying in the road half-dead, or, perhaps, wandering over the plains. We must go back, and find her if possible. Here, Taylor, turn the horses. We must look for her, even if we have to go back to that brook near Tecalote."

"Well, of course," said Taylor, "I'm willin' to do what's proper; but I know it ain't no use. You'll never see *her* again. I don't want to scare you, ladies; but only about ten miles back I saw tracks of Injuns a-crossin' the road, and a-goin' south. Them was fresh tracks, too, not over an hour old; and it's a dangerous piece of business goin' back over this road now. We might all have our hair lifted within a couple of hours from now, and no one able to stop the operation either."

"Indians or no Indians," exclaimed the Professor, "we must go back! Could we show ourselves at home, knowing that no effort had been made to find the poor woman? Surely not, gentlemen."

There was a general murmur of approbation: so Bill Taylor, somewhat reluctantly, turned his horses' heads; and the stage was soon rolling back over the road they had just travelled.

"It's awfully dangerous, I tell you, this 'ere goin' back," said Taylor again, breaking the gloomy silence which had fallen over the party. "I really don't think it's safe to go farther than the place where I saw them trails. The devils may be a-lurkin' anywhere about here a-watchin' us. I've seen 'em spring up out of holes in the ground they'd dug, and kill a whole party with one discharge of their rifles, darn their red hides!"

No one made any reply to this tragic statement; but all kept a sharp lookout, both for the supposed Mrs. Aldergrove, and for the Indians, who were certainly at no great distance.

At last Taylor drew up his horses, and, dismounting, began carefully to inspect the road.

"Here's the trail I saw an hour ago," he said. "There's a big lot of 'em, I can tell you," he added, as several of the passengers got out, and joined him. "About fifty, I should say; though a guess of that kind is pretty uncertain. They've crossed the road, and are now, very likely, ten or twelve miles off to the southward. Well, now, gents, what do you say? Shall we give it up as a bad job, and go on our way again?"

"I think we ought to go back a little farther, — a mile or two, for instance," said the Professor. "It is frightful to think she may be somewhere in the neighborhood, and it seems heartless to leave her to her fate until we are quite sure we cannot help her."

"Don't forget, Professor, that we've two more women and a little girl with us," said Taylor. "If we men were the only ones concerned, darn me if I wouldn't go back till we got to the end of the road but what I'd find her. But, you see, we ain't by ourselves; and the danger is just enough to make my blood run cold when I think of what might happen to them others. Still, we'll go back a mile or two; and then, if we don't find her, on we goes."

Much discussion ensued about the matter; but it was resolved at last, that Taylor's advice should be followed, and that, if at the end of another mile no trace of the missing lady should be discovered, the search should be abandoned.

Scarcely had the stage travelled half that distance, when Taylor again stopped, and leaped to the ground with an exclamation of astonishment. Before another moment had elapsed, he was on his hands and knees attentively examining the road.

"Darn me!" he cried in some excitement, "if here ain't more on 'em."

"More what?" asked several voices, as one passenger after the other descended in haste from the stage.

"Why, tracks, to be sure," answered Taylor. "Just look here," he continued, pointing to the ground: "what do you call that?"

The men bent down, and looked intently at the road, across which the tracks of horses' hoofs were distinctly visible.

"It's no joke to get between two of them trails," said Taylor anxiously. "These last fellows can't be very far off, either. Why, hallo!" he cried, rising suddenly, and going forward a few steps, "what's this? Well, I never! Just come here, gents."

He stooped down, and, picking up some object from the ground, held it triumphantly aloft in his outstretched hand.

It was a small piece of crape, such as might have been torn from a lady's veil.

The passengers gathered about him, all talking excitedly in concert. Mrs. Aldergrove and Margaret leaned forward from the stage-window, and looked intently at Taylor.

"What have you there?" inquired Margaret with forced calmness. "What have you found?"

"A piece of the poor lady's veil, miss," replied Taylor, approaching the stage. "The redskins must have carried her off. What do you say?" he asked, turning to the others.

"Oh! my poor, poor cousin," cried Mrs. Aldergrove, placing her handkerchief to her eyes. "This is too horrible. O Cordelia! what is to be done?"

While she was speaking, Professor Hoveden had turned away, and walked forward a little distance, attracted by something white which lay upon the ground. He picked it up unobserved, and glanced at it with curiosity. It was a handkerchief, evidently the property of the lost lady. He wound it about his fingers carelessly, and was on the point of going back to restore it to the supposed Héricourts, when a name written in one corner of it caught his eye. The letters were not very distinct, but they were sufficiently so to enable him to decipher them without much trouble. As he did so, a strange expression passed over his face, and a slight exclamation of astonishment escaped him. He stood for a moment irresolutely: then, placing the handkerchief in his pocket, he walked leisurely back to the rest of the party.

"I don't see any use in goin' any farther to look for her," Taylor was saying. "Every minute makes the danger worse in this place, and I'm dead certain sure that the redskins have got her. That bit of crape is about all you'll ever see of her again."

"You are quite right," said Margaret composedly.

"My aunt and I, hard as it is, have made up our minds that our cousin is lost. It would be more than selfish in us to keep you here longer. Pray leave us to ourselves, and turn back whenever you please, — the sooner the better if, as you say, danger threatens. Besides, every moment here calls up the most horrible visions."

She shuddered a little as she spoke, and, taking up a cloak, wrapped it about her shoulders.

"My poor Cordelia," sobbed Mrs. Aldergrove. "It is doubly hard for you, as you have recently been so ill. But be strong if you can, and do not give way. Remember the life of usefulness before us, and trust in God, who does all things for the best."

"Yes," said Margaret calmly. She was sitting upright, her pale lips set and rigid, her eyes fixed, and vacant in expression.

"You must bear with us both, Professor Hoveden," said Mrs. Aldergrove. "You can understand our affliction. Do not let the other passengers see or speak to us. We could not endure it, could we, Cordelia?"

"No," said Margaret mechanically.

"But may I not bring you some refreshment?" asked the Professor, after having spoken a few words of polite sympathy. "A cup of strong coffee will do you both good."

The ladies assented; and he went toward the fire, that had already been lighted.

Mrs. Aldergrove drew nearer to her daughter. "They do not suspect," she whispered cautiously. "They will never know. I think with you, Margaret, that God inspired the act."

"Hush!" said Margaret, "we might be overheard. Do not speak to me. Remember the part you have to play."

They sat in silence for a few moments, until the Pro-

fessor brought them each a cup of coffee, and then withdrew to join the other passengers at breakfast.

"I suppose as long as the ladies is satisfied, you're satisfied too, gents," said Taylor.

"Yes," said the Professor, "we are quite satisfied." He spoke in a forced, unnatural tone, which was at once observed by Glatz.

"Why, what the devil is the matter with you, Professor?" he asked, laying his hand on the latter's arm. "I never saw anybody look so queer in my life."

"Come with me, Glatz: I have something to tell you," replied the Professor, drawing him aside, and walking a few steps down the road.

"What is it, — more suspicions?" inquired Glatz. "You can beat my wife at that sort of thing, hang me if you can't! Well, out with it, my dear sir. What have you discovered now?"

"This," said the Professor, drawing the handkerchief from his pocket. "I found it below on the road."

"And it belongs to the missing lady, I suppose," said Glatz. "Let's have a look at it."

"By all means," answered the Professor. "Do you observe any thing strange about it, Glatz?"

"Any thing strange? No, I can't say that I do. It's pretty much like any other handkerchief, so far as I can see. If my wife were here, however, she would see something strange about it, I'll warrant. She is the greatest woman for finding out things that I ever came across. Did I ever tell you about my wife and the microscope, Professor?"

"Yes, I know all about it, Glatz. But I see they are preparing to move on," said the Professor, "so we have no time to lose in idle discussion. Look in the corner of the handkerchief, and read the name written there. Can you make it out?"

"Well, yes, I think I can. It's Anastasia Héricourt as plain as day," said Glatz. "By Jove, Professor," he cried suddenly, "that is queer, and no mistake!"

"Yes, it is rather peculiar," said the Professor dryly.

"Looks a little like foul play, eh?" inquired the other in a whisper.

"I am not prepared to say. But the finding of this handkerchief has not lessened my suspicions concerning those two women," said the Professor with emphasis. "I shall watch them now more closely than before. Did you notice any thing unusual in their manner when the alarm was given this morning?"

"Nothing more than could reasonably be expected, under the circumstances."

"Well, I did. I thought they were trying to conceal something,—their real feelings, I mean. And, when Heyward mentioned somnambulism, Miss Cordelia jumped at the suggestion instantly. Even now a close observer might see that fear, not grief, is the chief passion that sways them."

"It looks bad, certainly," said Glatz gloomily. "What are you going to do with the handkerchief?"

"Keep it," replied the Professor briefly, restoring it to his pocket as he spoke. "It may be of use hereafter. But do not speak of it, Glatz."

They reached the stage at this moment, where all was in readiness for the continuation of the journey. The buffalo-robe had again been arranged as a partition, and the curtains belonging to the ladies' compartment were closely drawn. All was silent within.

"I believe you are right, Professor," whispered Glatz. "There's something wrong about those two women. I'd give my head to know what they are doing in there."

The Professor made no answer. The passengers took their seats once more, and the driver gathered up the reins.

"Papa," said little Castaly Fielding, as Bill Taylor cracked his whip, and the horses sprang forward, "I would like to tell you something. I think I had a queer dream last night. May I tell you, papa?"

"Not now, Castaly," said Mr. Fielding, who was thoughtful and pre-occupied.

"It was about that poor lady who fell out," said the child, looking disappointed. "I thought you might like to hear it, papa."

"Some other time, my dear," replied Mr. Fielding, patting her cheek kindly. "And now," he continued, turning to the others, "do you think we could dispel a part of our gloom with the divine odor of tobacco?"

"We can at least make the attempt," answered Glatz. "So, gentlemen, let us light our pipes."

CHAPTER XIV.

BROKEN FETTERS.

“Car sans la liberté, quelle union existerait-il entre les hommes? Ils seront unis comme le cheval est uni à celui qui le monte, comme le fouet du maître à la peau de l’esclave.” — LAMENNAIS: *Paroles d'un Croyant*.

It must not be supposed that Padre Lamont had come to his determination hastily, nor was he actuated to it by any other motive than a purely conscientious one. It has already been intimated, if not said, that he was by no means bigoted in his religious views; and of late much reflection had tended to increase the liberality of his opinions. He was one who, when not actively employed in the exercise of his duties, spent his time in earnest study. It was impossible, therefore, that, during the long hours passed in company with the most enlightened philosophers of the past and present, and having, moreover, a mind well opened to receive each new impression as it presented itself, he should not have risen gradually to regard the essence of matters and things with greater reverence than the mere forms which represented it. He had, however, never thought seriously of casting away his vows (for, after all, they afforded him many opportunities for doing good), until the suspicion of his growing attachment to Cordelia Héricourt arose. The idea of any tender feeling on her part for him had as yet hardly occurred to him, or, if so, but dimly. The love which had taken root in his heart

some time ago had put forth countless branches, which, unknown to him, had twined themselves about every fibre of his being; and now that he had become aware of this, his horror and shame knew no bounds. And with it all was something he was unable to understand, — an elevation of sentiment, a dignity of character, that astonished him, — until it came before him with a feeling of intense pleasure, that a love which ennobled, rendered every object in life beautiful, and raised his whole nature to a point hitherto unattained, could not be sinful or degrading. He took, with trembling hands, book after book from his small library, seeking to justify himself by every wise precept of philosophy. The priesthood, — what was it? What were vows made in the first flush of youthful enthusiasm and inexperience? He tried to put aside the thought of Cordelia, and to look at the matter from a disinterested point. If he could bring himself honestly to believe that he would have renounced his vows independently of Cordelia, and merely from the force of his convictions, what an immense relief he might experience! This was what he tried to discover.

In the meanwhile he passed two sleepless nights and days alone in his study, now reading, now pacing the floor with restless strides, and, again, sitting motionless, his head bowed upon his hands. Occasionally he would throw himself on his bed, to seek, if possible, a few moments' repose; but his excited brain passed rapidly from one reflection to another, from close observations to those that were vague and remote. All the while he sought, with determination, to concentrate his ideas upon the one point which doubt left open; and, even when he had almost decided it to his satisfaction, his scrupulous honesty caused him to hesitate, and inquire still further. He did not fear the result of this investigation. He was independent enough to have long since recognized the fact, that a certain liberty is essential

to true greatness of character, and that it holds forth to the individual the privilege of living his life in his own way.

As Padre Lamont thought deeply upon the matter, he was able, by degrees, to regard his own sentiments with something very like an increase of self-respect. He felt it to be his duty, however, to communicate his decision to the Bishop, as the head of the diocese; and this was any thing but an agreeable task. It was not that he dreaded the anger of his superior, nor the cold contempt which would probably follow it; but he hated the thought of being forced to reveal his reasons to another, and, above all, laying bare his cherished secret, which was to him sacred, and which he knew the Bishop's keen penetration would soon discover.

He put off the evil day as long as possible: then, gathering resolution, he summoned all his courage, and presented himself before the Bishop.

Bishop Lambert, in many respects, was harmless enough. He enjoyed the reputation of being extremely clever, for his conversation was considered by the dwellers in Santa Fe to be brilliant. A discerning mind, however, might easily see that he was merely one of those lesser luminaries which shine by means of rays borrowed from greater ones. Just as the Pope's secretary owes all his opinions to the intelligence of his spiritual master, so did the Bishop derive his wit and his theories from minds more illustrious than his own. When Padre Lamont was ushered into his presence, he found him reclining upon an easy-chair, with a volume of some humorous French writer of the last century upon his knee.

"Ah! Padre Lamont," he said, with a lazy smile, extending three fingers in greeting. "It is not often that I have the pleasure of receiving a visit from you. I am very glad to see you looking so well. And may I ask how

the work is progressing? Not discouraged, I hope, eh?"

"No, your Grace," replied Lamont, taking a chair in front of the Bishop. His courage almost failed him as he looked at his companion's round, good-natured face, upon which he had seen occasionally an expression of malicious anger; and he glanced about the room, in the hope of diverting his mind, and gaining confidence.

"The people," said the Bishop, referring, doubtless, to the natives of Santa Fe, "are a very bad set, I acknowledge. The man who is able to instil into their minds any notions of truth or honesty, and incite them to even an occasional good action, will have accomplished a noble work." He sought in his memory for some apt quotation, but, finding none, continued in an easy tone, "You, my dear padre, have been particularly successful. Where others have failed, or proved themselves to be unworthy of their trust, you have pressed steadily onward to distinction, and have thereby gained the respect and affection of all with whom you have come in contact. The Church regards you — will ever regard you, I hope — as one of her shining lights and dearest treasures."

"Your Grace is too partial," stammered Lamont. "I have done nothing. If, perhaps, I have gained esteem, and been moderately successful in my work, it has been owing more to circumstances than to any actual merit on my part." He hesitated, hardly knowing what to say next.

"You do yourself injustice, *padre mio*," said the Bishop kindly. "From the position I occupy, I can observe much which qualifies me to express a decided opinion in regard to you. There is not your equal in the whole diocese."

"Pray, say no more," began Lamont, extending his hand with a quick gesture, and then withdrawing it as suddenly. "You deceive yourself. I am not what you think me, —

what your generosity leads you to suppose. It is for this reason that I came here to-day. For a long time," he went on, speaking in a low, hurried tone, "I have felt incapacitated for the work I have been doing. It is not that I think myself unable to accomplish good, or to meet with favorable results in my undertakings, but simply because I am convinced I could be just as true a friend to the Church and humanity were I differently situated. Wait a moment," he interposed, seeing the Bishop about to speak; "hear me, and then judge me as you will. When I entered the priesthood, I was little more than a boy; but I did so honestly convinced that I should find in my profession the requirement of every need. And I did, up to a certain point. When I came to Santa Fe, and saw opportunities here for bringing the wretched inhabitants to a more enlightened state, while the field for individual improvement was apparently unlimited, I thought I had nothing left to desire. Every day the consciousness of having advanced a step made me doubly zealous on the morrow. It seemed to me," he continued, with a faint flush of excitement, "that in time, amid such surroundings, I might rise above every petty earthly consideration, and devote my whole life to the service of the Church in a manner dreamed of by many, but seldom carried out, even by a few. Then, all at once, a feeling of discontent crept upon me. I thought I could work more happily and easily were I not bound by any ties. I had read much philosophy, your Grace, and discovered that the soul which is chained, even though the links be of silver and gold, can never thoroughly be itself. I became constrained and uneasy, but at that time I had no intention of renouncing my vows. It was not until" — He stopped abruptly, and bit his lip, as though suffering some acute physical pain.

While Lamont was speaking, the Bishop's features had

undergone a marked change. At first his expression had been one of utter amazement and incredulity: now it was both sorrowful and angry. The cheerful light had faded from his eyes, and given way to a pained look of annoyance.

"Padre Lamont," he said presently, "surely I misunderstand you. You have hinted at a desire to retire from the priesthood. You certainly cannot mean that. Pray express yourself more clearly." He leaned forward, as if in eagerness to discover his mistake.

"Alas!" said Lamont sadly, "you have understood me but too well. I do mean to renounce my vows. I am not fitted for the Church, for the life is not one that satisfies me. Do not think, however, that it is my intention to let my energies lie dormant. I will work in the interest of our holy faith, even if my principles draw me away from its immediate influence. I should be a coward otherwise. Only, I cannot bear to think I am held in subjection."

"Ah! can you call it subjection?" asked the Bishop, in a tone of mingled surprise and mortification. "Are we ever slaves to those we love? Your words pain me beyond measure: you do not know what you are saying."

Lamont did not reply. His eyes wandered restlessly from the Bishop to the table, and then to the window. The atmosphere without was damp and heavy. A light rain was falling, and the street seemed deserted; for no sound was heard anywhere, save from the carved wooden clock on the Bishop's mantel-piece.

"I am not moved by a sudden impulse," he went on, after a short silence. "You will never know—no one will ever know—how much all this has cost me. Look at me," he continued, stretching forth both hands, and resting his eyes fearlessly upon the Bishop's face: "you can see that I have passed sleepless nights, and days made weary by continual conflict. I have thought to lose

my self-respect by leaving the Church. I know now that I can forfeit it only by remaining within its precincts."

"Take care!" said the Bishop, holding up a warning finger, on which sparkled a brilliant ruby. "Do not say that of which you may repent in an hour's time."

"I have already told you that I am not speaking hastily," said Lamont, "and that I have given the matter due reflection."

The Bishop lay back in his chair, and thoughtfully tapped his book with his fingers. His eyes were down-cast, so that Lamont could not observe their expression; but presently they were raised to his own, and he saw they were filled with keen disappointment. The sight caused him a momentary pang; for he liked his superior, and regretted that he should suffer on account of one in whom he had placed, apparently, such implicit confidence.

"And have you no other motive?" asked the Bishop, with a quick glance at his companion. "Is your desire to renounce the vows you voluntarily assumed founded solely upon this absurd longing for freedom, — freedom which would be far removed from your thoughts were your heart sincere, and filled with the light of true religion?"

Lamont hesitated. The moment, he knew, had come when he must lay bare the secret of his love to profane eyes, wherein it was impossible for a shadow of sympathy to dwell. Probably the honesty and sincerity of his nature had never been of greater use to him than they were now. He drew himself up, with a gesture almost of defiance, and answered deliberately, —

"Yes, your Grace, there is another motive, — one which I can, however, truthfully call secondary. Perhaps, unconsciously, one has instigated the other. I am not quite sure. But, be that as it may, my determination is unalterable. With my present thoughts and feelings, and

looking calmly upon the change which of late has taken place in my life, I can plainly see that I must renounce all active interest in the Church." As he paused, the Bishop crossed his legs, and joined the tips of his fingers together, while a somewhat cynical smile passed over his lips.

"So you are in love," he said. "I thought as much. '*Cherchez la femme*' must always be our cry in things of this sort, as well as every other. That you, however, above all, should be moved to pursue your present course for any such paltry reason," he added severely, "astonishes as much as it grieves me. I had thought you superior to the petty passions by which ordinary men are swayed. I supposed that your heart, your life, your very soul, were bound up in your faith, and the work to which you had been appointed. How many times have you told me your sole happiness consisted in the good which was being accomplished by your own efforts! Will you, can you, desert the noble cause you have voluntarily undertaken and sworn to defend? Will you deliberately turn your back upon the Church when she has most need of you? Think, Lamont! Think, I implore you!" The Bishop said the last words in a tone of subdued excitement. For a moment Lamont was impressed, and his mind involuntarily recalled the scruples and doubts by which he had been assailed in the beginning. But it was only for a moment.

"It is impossible," he said, with determination, "that you should regard the matter as I do. You cannot know all that passes, all that has already passed, in my mind. And it would be a useless task for me to attempt to explain it to you. I should but wound your sensibilities, shock, perhaps, your most cherished principles, — and to what end? I should not convince you that I am right; and no arguments of yours could alter my decision, which

has cost me a struggle greater, probably, than any you have ever known." He had dropped his defiant tone, and was speaking almost sadly. For an instant the Bishop seemed moved by something closely resembling pity.

"Ah, *padre mio!*" he said, "I little expected this from you. I cannot express the extent of my sorrow and disappointment. O my son, pray consider what you are about to do! If you are really in earnest, I pity you from the depths of my heart; but my pity is not unmixed with scorn. You are wantonly throwing aside the protecting arm of our Holy Church; you are repaying her care with base ingratitude; you will turn her proud and loving smile into bitter tears. Can I say nothing to persuade you, Lamont? Far be it from me to force your inclinations. I would have you come to me of your own free will, and say, 'I have been mistaken. My happiness is not where I supposed. It is, and always will be, embodied in our holy faith.' O Lamont! the day will come when this must be expressed in thought, though it be too late to put it into words. What then will be your position? You will recognize your fatal error; and yet the price must be paid,—paid by the sacrifice of your life, perhaps of your soul."

Lamont smiled faintly at this fervent appeal, and shook his head. His courage had returned tenfold since the confession of his love had been made. He felt a fresh stimulus to attain his end, incited thereto by mere disdain of the obstacles that presented themselves. He made a motion as if to speak, but the Bishop interrupted him.

"I cannot imagine," he said, letting his small, piercing eyes rest upon Lamont's face, "why this determination should have come to you now. At this moment you occupy an enviable position in regard to the Church. You have never been so beloved as now; and, not three weeks ago, no one was more zealous than you in the dis-

charge of his duties. You tell me you have two motives upon which rests the decision you have made. One is your convictions, if I mistake not; the other, your love for a woman. Am I right?"

There was no immediate answer. Lamont's slender fingers crushed the hat he held, and his face grew a shade paler. His lips were pressed tightly together, but his expression was again somewhat defiant.

The Bishop regarded him fixedly for a moment, and then a smile of relief overspread his features. "At last I have fathomed you, dear padre!" he exclaimed triumphantly. "It is merely a case of excessive work and nervous exhaustion with you. Your constant labors have been too much for you. Go away somewhere, and rest. Go to the south of France; and there, in the bracing air of the Pyrenees, with nothing to tax your mind, you will regain your health. We shall then hear no more of this frightful idea about the renunciation of your vows."

Again Lamont shook his head, with a sad smile.

"Why did not the truth strike me before?" resumed the Bishop. "You say you have passed sleepless nights, and you are certainly troubled with morbid fancies. The slightest thing disturbs you apparently. You are depressed in spirits; and your power of application is, for the time being, destroyed. You hate the things you once loved, and you think you love things you formerly hated. My son," he added, leaning forward to regard Lamont attentively, "the idea of this love which now oppresses you is but a delusion due to your abnormal condition. '*Pfaffen lachen junge Weiber auch gern an*,' — even priests smile pleasantly on young women, as the proverb says," continued his Grace, with a laugh. "Shall I confess to you, that I, years ago, was similarly affected, but that complete mental rest, change of scene and associations, and God's holy guidance, enabled me to pass through the

ordeal unscathed? So it will be with you. You will go to France, and return in a year to your work, with renewed ardor."

"You are possibly in the right," Lamont answered. "I may be mentally weak, — sometimes I think I am; but whether or not this be the case," he continued vehemently, "my determination is taken, and past recall. If it is the result of a disordered mind, God will hold me guiltless. If, on the contrary, I have my full reason, the responsibility will be my own; and I will manfully avow it to Him."

"You are talking blasphemy," cried the Bishop in an angry tone. "But I see how it is. You are temporarily blinded by a vulgar passion. You speak to me of principles and convictions, when in reality it is your inclinations that lead you. You will calmly perjure yourself for a woman. May God forgive you! I cannot."

Lamont was silent. Large drops stood upon his forehead, and he was plainly striving his utmost to control the feelings that swayed him.

The Bishop watched him narrowly. Twice Lamont made an effort to speak, and failed: the third time he succeeded.

"Perhaps," he said slowly, uttering his words with difficulty, "you are right in the main. I do not seek to excuse myself. I have nothing to say in my own behalf. But believe me when I assert that I am conscious of acting honestly. I do love a woman — one so pure — so good" — He hesitated, seeing the Bishop make a disparaging gesture, and bit his lip. "It is useless to prolong the discussion," he added. "I have little hope indeed of being understood. He who would gain any thing from life must be content with the consciousness of well-doing, and be willing to do without the appreciation of others. As for the Church, it will be better off without me. There are many workers besides myself, — many who, doubtless, will

give you no reason to regret having appointed them. There is Padre Delatour, for instance, who for some time has been my subordinate, and who is energetic and faithful. Pray ask him to take my place. He will be glad of the opportunity of improving his position. The work I have begun will be carried on by him satisfactorily, I am sure. And now, your Grace, nothing remains to be said except to bid you farewell. I shall send you the formal renunciation of my vows to-night."

He rose from his chair as he spoke, his tall figure drawn up almost haughtily, his voice betraying calm deliberation.

"Yes," said the Bishop in a low tone, "I will appoint Padre Delatour. He, at least, will be faithful, as you have intimated. Go, if you will, Lamont, but take with you my scorn and contempt. You have outraged the Church, which has been to you a true and loving mother. No longer will her arms be opened to afford you divine protection. You have degraded yourself, and your conduct must excite the disgust of every true Catholic. What if I should publicly announce your shame? Could you endure this, Lamont? Think again: it is not too late."

"Yes," he answered steadily: "I could endure this, and much more."

"From another I could have borne it better. But you, Lamont, who have been the brightest hope of the Church, — my right hand, as it were!" The Bishop said the last words tremulously. Then, with a sigh, he turned away, and, leaning back in his chair, shaded his eyes with both hands.

Lamont stood motionless for a moment, regarding him sorrowfully. He felt animated by a keen sense of pity. Presently he left the room noiselessly, and descended to the street, where the rain still fell in misty torrents.

In spite of the painful impressions caused by the interview, he experienced a strange sensation of relief. The

drops that fell upon his face cooled his heated forehead, and seemed to refresh every faculty. He looked upon himself almost in the light of a hero.

“To have made a determination,” he thought, “and to have announced it boldly: to fight against opposition, and to be willing to fight to the end for the sake of my convictions,—is surely a gain. I have lost nothing, and have advanced in my individual attainments. But whither will it all lead me? Everywhere, perhaps, except to the desired end. My happiness, if ever I possessed it, is a thing of the past.” He drew a deep breath involuntarily. Then, buttoning closely about him the long cassock which he wore for the last time, he strode off into the leaden atmosphere.

CHAPTER XV.

AN INTERVIEW.

“A mind might ponder its thought for ages, and not gain so much self-knowledge as the passion of love shall teach it in a day.” — EMERSON.

THERE was a good deal of excitement in Santa Fe when it became known that Padre Lamont had renounced the priesthood. The reasons given for the act were many and various ; but, as is usual in such cases, the absence of definite knowledge did not prevent the people from expressing their opinions. It mattered little to Lamont what they said. In his first moments of freedom, his exalted spirits, born of the consciousness of having gained a victory over himself and others, left no room in his mind for any thing else. With the full sense of his altered position before him, the world seemed to have grown brighter and fairer. That penetrating and absorbing enthusiasm which usually comes to us only in early youth had taken entire possession of him. This was, of course, temporary ; for he had, so far, neglected to view the facts of the case in their entirety. But he knew that the greatest struggle of all was yet to come, and that his present satisfaction served for it only as a limited oblivion. When the mood passed, as it did shortly, life appeared to him in an unfamiliar form, so broad and incomprehensible, that he doubted whether he would ever be able either to grasp or to understand it. His restless mind, leaping boldly from

one conclusion to another, formed no ideas that in themselves were definite and lasting. He felt impatient to see Cordelia, and yet shrank involuntarily from the thought of meeting her, attracted by inclination, and repelled by fear of weakness. He was confident that his momentary forgetfulness during their last interview had surprised and shocked her, and he wondered dimly what her feelings would be when the knowledge of that which he had since done should reach her. He had little hope of gaining immediately either her approbation or her sympathy, and upon this hypothesis a great deal of his courage depended. With his course of action plainly marked out for him, and with the firm determination to follow it regardless of personal desire, her disapproval was perhaps preferable to her admiration. Lamont was, after all, but human, and consequently not exempt from certain kinds of weakness. Still, the resolution which of late he had been forced to practise had not been without its effect; and he felt, in a measure, prepared to endure much more than he had done already. It was in this spirit that he determined to go to Cordelia, and explain himself frankly, revealing every sentiment and doubt which he had experienced for months past. He had enough confidence in her to feel sure she would prefer the most unpleasant truth to the mere suspicion of dishonesty; and he resolved to hide nothing, which, if concealed, might place him in a more favorable light.

It had been his intention to go to the convent on the morning following his conversation with the Bishop; but the unsettled state of his mind caused him to delay the visit until late in the afternoon, two days later.

When he reached the entrance, and opened the heavy iron gate, he stopped for a moment in the garden, to resolve more definitely than he had yet done upon what he should do and say. As he stood upon the broad gravel-path, and inhaled the rich perfume of the roses and carnations which

blossomed on each side in crimson luxuriance, varied sensations, difficult to define, arose within him. Like most intellectual natures, Lamont was extremely sensitive to impressions. The intense silence, broken only by the steady splash of the fountain, and the occasional buzzing of a locust; the rays of warm sunlight which fell obliquely across the tall, waving grass,—affected him strangely. He felt one inspiration after another flash through his mind like lightning. There were about him countless influences which he knew ought somehow to be retained; and yet he was perfectly sure, that in Cordelia's presence they would pass from his recollection like a dream.

When he finally knocked at the convent-door, it seemed to him that he had remained in the garden for hours, each moment possessing a vivid significance of its own. He was, however, calm and collected, standing with his arms folded across his breast, the result of long habit, his proudly raised head displaying the firm lines of mouth and chin.

Sister Josefa, who admitted him, glanced at him curiously. He wore the ordinary dress of a citizen; but, apart from this, the rumor of his broken vows must already have reached Our Lady of Guadalupe. Lamont, quick to observe, noticed at once the nun's neglect to address him with the familiar *padre mio*; and he saw, too, that, in spite of her reserved and courteous manner, her ordinary smile of welcome was lacking.

She left him alone for a few moments, and returned presently to say that Miss Héricourt was indisposed, and begged to be excused, but that the Superior desired to speak with him privately. Lamont felt instinctively that Cordelia's message was but a pretext to avoid meeting him; but the purpose for which he had come there, he meant to accomplish if possible. As he followed Sister Josefa to the Superior's room, he wondered what he should

do to obtain the interview he desired. He had always been on the most friendly terms with the Superior, but he had little hope that she would endeavor to further his interests now that he had lost all claim to her regard. As he entered her presence, her rather hard face was unusually severe; and she took no notice of the hand he extended toward her.

She motioned him to a seat, however, and waited for him to speak.

"It was good in you to send for me," he said frankly, "although I know your friendship for me is at an end. You have heard, doubtless, of what has happened; and you can naturally look at it only in one light,—that of horror and disgust."

He spoke as if half in hope that she would contradict him. The Superior lowered her eyes, and did not reply for some moments. When she spoke at last, the tones of her voice sounded hard.

"I do know what has happened," she said slowly. "The knowledge of your act has just been brought to us, and you are right in supposing that my feelings toward you have changed. I am disappointed in you,—disappointed and horrified. Our blessed Church has given you so much, and you have returned her loving care with mean ingratitude." Her voice faltered a little, but she quickly recovered herself. "You can understand," she said calmly, "that no friendship can exist longer between us,—that, indeed, I would never look upon your face again. A traitor to the cause he has espoused has no place beneath this roof."

"I am not surprised that you should speak so," Lamont said, looking at her half sadly. "I did not expect to preserve your good opinion. I knew beforehand that opposition from all connected with the Church would meet me. But my motives"—

"Motives!" she interrupted, with a tinge of disdain in her voice. "I do not inquire into them, for they are of no consequence. It is enough for me to see their result."

"Could you look into my heart," said Lamont, "you would, I think, retract those words. However, I have not come here to discuss the matter with you. It is about Miss Héricourt that I wish to talk to you. I have something important to say to her, and I desire to see her for a few moments. She has sent me a message to the effect that she is indisposed; but I am sure, did she know of what I intend to speak, she would grant me an interview. Will you tell her? Do not refuse me," he added quickly. "I have no right, I am aware, to ask any thing of you; but you have known me long, and once you were my friend. Pray do not say no. I shall not be here for any length of time, for I feel that I must leave Santa Fe as soon as possible. I fear that I have had the misfortune to offend Miss Héricourt, and I seek merely an explanation before my departure. Go to her, mother. Tell her I am going away, and ask but to speak to her for a few moments."

"You ask this of me? Impossible!" said the Superior angrily. "You shall not corrupt the heart of the innocent child who has been confided to our keeping, — whom you yourself brought here to receive our care and instruction. You must be mad." She turned away her head, and tapped impatiently with her fingers upon the arms of her chair.

"Then, you refuse," said Lamont, after a short pause. "I do my duty," replied the Superior, looking at him half defiantly. "Cordelia is under my protection, and I am responsible for her moral and spiritual welfare."

"Very well," said Lamont, rising. "I must then adopt another course of action. I asked you because you had once been my friend, and I thought a trace of your former feeling for me might remain. But, since it is not so, I will

request one of the sisters to do for me what your conscience will not allow you to perform."

"Stop!" cried the Superior, rising also, and facing him. "I am mistress here, and no one will disobey my orders. You shall not see Cordelia Héricourt." Her breath came thick and fast, while her small dark eyes flashed with suppressed rage.

"Not if she persist in refusing to see me," Lamont said calmly. "But it is she who shall decide the matter, and no one else."

"No," cried the Superior. "I have said that I am mistress here." She began to pace the floor excitedly, her long black gown sweeping the carpet noiselessly, the cross and chain hanging from her belt striking the large bunch of keys by her side with an unmusical sound. Lamont stood still, and watched her. He could hardly believe her to be the woman whose suave and gentle demeanor he had formerly so greatly admired. Her once calm and elevated nature seemed to be suddenly transformed into one that was vulgar and commonplace. Nevertheless, he resolved to let neither her words nor her manner affect his decision in regard to Cordelia. The Superior came close to him presently, and he saw that tears stood in her eyes.

"What have you done? What have you done?" she cried brokenly. "Oh, how could you perjure yourself, — you, whom I thought the soul of honor!" She sank into a chair, and covered her face with both hands.

"I am not here to discuss my reasons with you," said Lamont coldly. "I have asked you to render me a slight service, and you have refused. There is no need of further conversation between us." He opened the door to leave the room; but the Superior, springing to her feet, detained him. The tears were still wet upon her cheeks, but her eyes flashed with renewed anger.

"You shall not!" she exclaimed. "You shall not see her! No one in this house dares to disobey me!"

Lamont gazed at her for an instant, and hesitated: then he shook off her clasp, and, turning, with his hand still upon the half-open door, came face to face with Cordelia herself, who was about to enter. He fell back a step, and Cordelia's pale face flushed crimson. The Superior started forward, brushing away the traces of tears upon her cheeks.

"Go, Cordelia, go!" she cried. "You must not come here, my child. Pray return to your room."

"Cordelia — Miss Héricourt!" exclaimed Lamont hastily, "I implore you, do not send me away without a word. You cannot refuse to speak to me for a few moments."

"Do not listen to him," cried the Superior excitedly. "No honest Catholic can have aught to do with a priest so degraded as he." She advanced toward Cordelia, and tried to lead her away; but the latter gently disengaged herself.

"Why, mother," she said, "what has happened? and why do you speak so of Padre Lamont?"

"You will soon know," answered the Superior; "but it is I who will tell you, and not he."

"That is for you to decide, Cordelia," said Lamont quickly. "Something has happened that I desire to tell you. Grant me but half an hour: you will not regret it."

"Say no, Cordelia," almost screamed the Superior. "My child, you cannot know all that is at stake. Be firm, and do not yield to the entreaties of this" —

"No more!" said Lamont, speaking impatiently for the first time. "When I am gone, you will have opportunity enough to poison her mind against me. Cordelia," he added gently, "let me ask you again, — will you speak to me alone for a few moments?"

Cordelia hesitated, and he watched her eagerly. The

Superior stood between them, her breast heaving with indignation, but cowed for the moment into silence by Lamont's last words to her.

"Yes," said Cordelia presently. "I will do as you wish, Padre Lamont." She spoke coldly, but he hardly noticed it in his sudden delight.

"How is it possible," said the Superior, "that you can listen to him in the face of my warning? You will repent of this, Cordelia." She clasped her hands together nervously. "You do not know what he has done," she wailed. "You would turn from him in horror if you did."

"Be that as it may, Cordelia has decided to let me speak to her," said Lamont. "But," he added a little bitterly, "do not fear that I shall seek to influence her in any way. I have something to tell her far different from what you suppose."

The Superior looked from one to the other, her brows knit in an angry frown. "Be it as you will, Cordelia," she said finally. "I can only advise, and warn you of the danger that threatens. I cannot compel you. As for you," she added, addressing Lamont, "you know what I think of you and your conduct. God forbid that I should ever see you again!" She measured them both with a look of mingled contempt and disappointment: then she left the room silently, her hands pressed tightly against her breast.

Cordelia appeared to be affected by none of the nervousness which the circumstances seemed to call forth. She was naturally surprised at the strange condition of affairs existing between Lamont and the Superior, and quite at a loss to explain it. His former conduct had grieved and hurt her beyond measure, and for this reason she had deemed it better not to see him; but feeling instinctively, after her message had been sent, that something of which she was ignorant had occurred, she resolved, notwithstand-

ing the Superior's entreaties, to grant Lamont the interview he demanded.

She now sat down, and looked at him inquiringly, the only change from her ordinary manner being a lack of the ease which had always characterized her intercourse with him. Her calm dignity sobered him instantly, causing every trace of his disquietude to vanish.

It was this very reserve which made it difficult for him to speak. Had she shown any signs of timidity, he thought it would have been easier for him to make his confession. But, after one or two coldly uttered words, she sat silent, letting her eyes rest earnestly upon his face with an expression half-wistful, half-wondering. Lamont felt that he must say something. He made a desperate effort, trying to control the tones of his voice, which did not sound natural.

"Miss Héricourt," he began, "have I offended you past all hope of pardon?"

She did not answer, and he continued somewhat timidly, —

"You have every right to regard me with distrust, and I do not wonder that you shrink from me. And yet, when you have heard all I have to say, when you know through what fierce ordeals I have lately passed, you will pity me, even if you are unable to forgive." He paused, and looked at her almost imploringly. "I can see," he went on, "that my words are scarcely understood by you. I do not think I am a weak man. I have always held irresolution in contempt. But now I find it hard to speak as I would. Can you give me no encouragement?"

"For what, Padre Lamont?" she asked with indifference. "I do not know what you can have to say to me."

"I feared it would be so," he answered bitterly. "Nevertheless," he added more calmly, "I could never have

imagined you to be so hard. Look at me, Cordelia. What does my face tell you? I do not want you to point out any traces of suffering you may find there. I only desire that you should discover my honesty. Am I no longer your friend? Have I lost all title to your regard? Will you shut me out of your confidence forever, because in a moment of forgetfulness I let you see that I loved you? No," he said with decision, interrupting the words which rose to her lips: "hear what I have to say, while I have the strength to utter it. You are horrified at my declaration: you shut your eyes, for you fear to be contaminated merely by looking at me."

"Oh, no! not that," said Cordelia, for the first time displaying any emotion. "But you were so near to me, and now you seem so far."

"Which means that you can trust me no longer," he said sadly. "Well, be it so. Perhaps, after all, you are right. It ought to take years of faithful and unselfish devotion to blot from your mind the remembrance of my words and acts; and I will begin this day to outweigh, little by little, the wrong I have done you. And yet, when you know what has happened, you will despise me still more. Cordelia, I have renounced my vows. I am no longer a priest. Look at my dress: it speaks for me." He stopped abruptly, overcome by the vehemence of his words. Cordelia bent forward, her face growing a shade paler than before. For a moment an expression of alarm swept over her features; and, when she spoke, her tone was low and indistinct.

"Renounced your vows!" she said, almost in a whisper. "Oh! no — no" — She drew back instinctively, holding both hands before her, as if to ward off some dreaded approach.

"Do not look so horrified," cried Lamont eagerly. "When I tell you the whole sad story, you will surely no

longer distrust me. I am not suited to the priesthood, and I have known it for some time. Besides this, I love you, — have loved you ever since we were first thrown together. I did not yield blindly to this passion, but, on the contrary, struggled against it with all the strength of which I was capable. It was then I discovered how poor and weak a thing human nature is; for although individual traits, which chance had hitherto prevented from coming forward, were revealed to me in the conflict, I felt they were valueless unless directed in one particular course. Much that had been obscure to me before, became suddenly clear. But to what end? Only that I might the better perceive my love for you, and my inability to overcome it. Ah, Cordelia! I think I lived years in those few days."

"I cannot understand," said Cordelia, still avoiding his glance, "how you, a priest of the Church, could renounce your vows, — you who apparently knew so well how to live up to them."

"The emotions incident to every hour," continued Lamont, not heeding the interruption, "did more toward maturing my whole nature than months of ordinary experiences could have done. And with it all came determinations which I felt must be acted upon. One has been successfully carried out. I have seen the Bishop, and stated my case to him frankly. I have boldly torn myself from the false position which I occupied. I did not tremble before the Bishop. I spoke to him as one man should speak to another. But with you it is different, and a thousand times more difficult. Your manner discourages me, and I am like a child in your hands. I know that I perhaps do not express myself as I should, — that I am not taking the proper way to regain the confidence you once gave me freely and fully. But I am hardly myself at this moment. Surely you can understand this."

Cordelia said nothing. Her face betrayed a cold and almost cruel indifference.

“Why do you not speak to me?” he asked unsteadily.

“Because — because I cannot,” she said finally in an undertone. “And how would you have me speak, — you who have done so terrible a thing? A priest of the Church,” she added vehemently, “a stanch upholder of our faith, the most earnest worker in the cause of religion, to come to me with so degrading a confession! No, certainly, I have nothing to say to you.”

“Cordelia,” — he began, and went no farther. All the passion of his impetuous nature became suddenly aroused by her contemptuous words. The blood rushed in a hot wave to his face; and for a few moments he dared not speak, lest he should lose control of himself.

“I deserve, perhaps, all that you have said,” he exclaimed at last, displaying but little trace of his momentary agitation. “I have thought from the beginning that I was acting in a manner calculated to inspire the respect, even if not the approval, of every sincere nature. I must be wrong if you can take such a view of my conduct as you have just expressed. Your words have pained me, Cordelia: you fail, I think, to consider all the circumstances of the case. Had I not loved you, I could not have continued much longer in the service of the Church. I acknowledge that my feelings toward you may have led me to think more deeply than otherwise upon the matter, and inquire into my condition with special zeal; but when, little by little, light and truth dawned upon me, I saw clearly, that, apart from you, I was swayed by other sentiments. Do you not believe me? Will you refuse still to listen to me?”

“I do not mean to be cruel,” said Cordelia with determination, “but I cannot listen to you. I regret infinitely your act. You yourself will repent of it, I fear, before any

length of time has elapsed. What can be thought of a priest who renounces his vows, particularly for such reasons as you have revealed to me?"

"Is it possible," said Lamont, as though speaking to himself, "that you can be so harsh, so inflexible! When will you understand me?"

"I understand you but too well," she replied gravely. "Will you hear me for a moment, as I have heard you? When we first knew you," she went on after a pause, "I thought I might be perfected, both spiritually and mentally, by your interest and companionship. I did not stop to inquire into the reasons for this; but I was dimly conscious that good ones were there, and that they consisted in your upright character, your integrity, your firm adherence to principle. And I was not mistaken. All this you had, and more. You say, that by degrees you found yourself unsuited to the calling you had chosen. Were this so, why not have made use of your noble qualities for the purpose of overcoming the temptation? I do not wish to be hard upon you. I am only a girl, and but a short time ago I was quick to recognize your superiority. But where now is that superiority? Have you shown yourself to be above the most ordinary nature? Is it not a disgrace to have fallen from the heights which you yourself have built?" She kept her face averted. When Lamont spoke, it was in so low a tone that she could scarcely hear him.

"Then," he said, "you have nothing but contempt for me—contempt for my honesty—contempt for my love. I had thought that you would, at least, treat me without prejudice."

"I am not prejudiced," she answered, speaking for the first time almost gently. "And I do not mean to express contempt, but pity."

"Pity!" cried Lamont passionately. "Can you not see that your pity is the hardest thing for me to bear? Con-

tempt, even though deserved, is short lived generally, — but pity! Oh," he continued, after a pause, "if you could only be a little more generous, — if you could treat me as a man, and not merely as a priest!"

"I would gladly do so if I could see that you had acted unselfishly in the matter," exclaimed Cordelia. "If you had renounced the priesthood from conviction, after mature reflection, I could respect your honesty, however much I might lament the course of your thought, and the conclusion you had reached. But when, with the same breath that tells me of your apostasy," she continued, her color rising, "you avow a feeling unworthy of a priest, I can scarcely repress"—

"Stop!" said Lamont, lifting his hand, and speaking with measured calmness. "Do not let us misunderstand each other. You think I have forsworn the priesthood merely because of my love for you. Clearly you do not know me. For, in abjuring my vows, I, at the same time, renounce you. I knew, when the conviction came upon me that I could no longer be happy as a priest, that the hope of winning you was at an end. I shall love you as long as I live, Cordelia, but I shall never ask you to be my wife;—and," he added finally, "I shall probably never see you again."

While they were speaking, the twilight had gradually deepened. Each could just catch the outline of the other's figure; and Cordelia saw that Lamont had bent forward, and buried his face in both hands. Just then the door was opened softly; and one of the sisters appeared with a lamp, which she placed silently upon the table, leaving the room with her noiseless tread immediately afterward.

"Say no more to me," exclaimed Cordelia hurriedly. "I cannot bear it." Her voice gave evidence of a strong emotion; and Lamont, raising his head, looked at her sadly.

"You have indeed failed to understand me," he said,

“if, for a moment, you imagined that I sought your love in return for mine. I should deserve your contempt, and that of every right-minded person, were that the case. No, Cordelia, I ask nothing of you, except your appreciation of the efforts I have made, and shall continue to make. Could you think so ill of me as to suppose I would thrust aside my vows for love of you, and give myself up to the gratification of my desires? O Cordelia, truly you have not grasped the meaning of my words or acts! I am not so utterly lost to all sense of honor. You know that to win your love would be happiness—life—every thing to me. But I prefer to renounce all these, rather than purchase them at the price of self-respect. Fortunately, you do not love me. Were this not so, I doubt if I should have sufficient strength to speak to you in this way. The struggle, thank God! is all on my side; and you, at least, are exempt from pain. Do you understand me now? Can you regard my conduct with more lenity? Do not answer me hastily.”

Cordelia's face flushed slightly.

“I understand,” she said, in a softer tone. “And I ask your forgiveness if I have been too quick in my judgment. I think, however,” she continued presently, “that you are mistaken, and that much which now passes with you for reality is but a shadow which time will dissipate. I cannot forget that you have been my friend, and this makes it hard for me; for otherwise I could speak more calmly to you. But I will do as you ask me. I will try to think kindly of you, and I will do my best to believe that you were actuated by honorable motives.”

“You speak generously,” he said, drawing a short, quick breath; “but I can see that it costs you an effort to do so. There is much more that I should like to say to you. It would be a relief to me to tell you the whole history of my love,—how it suddenly entered my heart, and cast out

every thing except my sense of what was due to myself. Sometimes, when I look back upon that long, painful struggle, in which duty strove to master inclination, I wonder whence the strength for victory was borrowed. And by duty, Cordelia, I do not mean the mere performance of an action which conscience, or oftener habit, renders imperative. I understand it to be something more than this: it must be directed toward ends productive of good to the doer himself, and, when exercised on behalf of another, to him also. In all that I have lately done, I have been actuated by duty in its highest sense. I am not debased. I am not degraded. On the contrary, I am better in all respects; for I am conscious of having advanced a step in the perfection of my own nature, which, after all, is the truest religion. But I will not trouble you with all this. Presently I shall leave you: but, before I go, speak to me a little of yourself; that is, if you can trust me enough to give me a portion of your confidence. It is not much, surely, to ask."

"I hardly know what to tell you," she said gravely. "You think me harsh and unkind, but I am not so intentionally. I, too, am honest; and, should I declare my approval of your conduct, I should be untrue to myself and to you. Pray, let us dwell no longer upon the matter. It is painful to us both, and can do no good. As for me, I shall find happiness in carrying out a noble work to a noble end. You know of the use to which my aunt and myself intend to put our recently acquired fortune; and you know, also, that life to me means something more than mere existence. I have powers which must be exercised, needs that require to be satisfied; and from this work I shall reap ample gratification. I know what you would say," she added, seeing Lamont extend his hand impulsively, "but it is no longer possible for me to be guided by your advice."

“You are right,” he said wearily; “but I should like above all things to be of service to you. And, indeed, whether you repel me or not, I shall always be your friend, Cordelia. The day may come, perhaps, when I can help you; and, if so, you will find no more ready assistant than I. It is your happiness that I place before every thing, and this is the surest proof of my love that I can offer you. I neither hesitate nor doubt. I would joyfully have received the gift of your love, had you been able to give it, and I to accept it. But, since this is not so, I shall be content to do without it. Pray, understand that I do not complain of circumstances; and that, though I shall always love you, I shall likewise be silent.”

He rose as he spoke, and stood for a moment regarding her sorrowfully. Presently he came toward the chair upon which she sat; and, as he did so, it seemed to him that the room grew suddenly dark. He took one of her hands in his, while his eyes eagerly sought her own. Cordelia felt apparently the influence of the glance; for she turned her head aside, as if unwilling even to grant him this last consolation. A momentary pause ensued. Then she heard his firm tread advance to the door, which in a few seconds closed softly behind him as he went out into the purple twilight.

CHAPTER XVI.

CORDELIA CONSIDERS.

“Virtue is like the East, different according to the situation from which we behold it.”

WHEN Cordelia reflected upon her interview with Lamont, something like remorse took possession of her. Every thought seemed to lessen his offence, and intensify her own coldness and severity. In thinking about the matter, she could partly understand his feelings : but the pity she felt for him was not of the deepest kind ; for compassion is always relative, and exercised only in proportion to our real or fancied experience. Cordelia had suffered, but in a manner totally different from Lamont. She could form no exact idea of the trial to which he had been subjected, not having imagination enough for so doing ; and, consequently, her cold reserve was rather the result of inexperience and uncultivated fancy than deliberate intention. She was not, of course, aware of this. She felt that Lamont had been weak, that he had yielded to temptation easily, and that his strong nature, no matter what it might now be, had at one time become commonplace.

In the energy and resolution of her character, Cordelia was undoubtedly superior to many women ; but she was not without certain prejudices, which were the direct result of her education. Of the world she knew little ; and just as Lamont had been, in his early youth, critical, and un-

charitable to the faults of others, so was she now, though in a less degree. She had thought to perceive in him her standard of excellence, and it was a cruel blow to find she had been mistaken. So completely, indeed, had she idealized him, that the mere exhibition of his human weakness was in her eyes almost a crime. She was not yet old enough to have acquired that liberality of judgment which looks rather to causes than to effects. Her independence was of a more restricted kind, dealing principally with her individual needs, and seldom becoming general. Nevertheless, she felt that she had been unnecessarily harsh with Lamont. He had been her friend as well as her spiritual guide, and it was not easy to forget this. But his motives, as he had explained them to her, took no firm grasp upon her mind; and the knowledge of his love for her did not affect her otherwise than as a regret. And what was his resolve to ask nothing from her, beyond an ordinary duty? As for his convictions, they were incomprehensible. What, indeed, could she understand of Lamont's convictions, — she, whose life had been lived slowly; while his, crowded with varied emotions, seemed to have been lengthened into centuries?

It was true that she did not love him. Had she done so, her quickened perceptions would have made her see much to which she now was blind. But gradually a faint reflection of her old friendship came back, and imbued her heart with gentle warmth. It was not the necessity she had formerly felt of revealing to him all that one nature ever does reveal to another, but simply the sensation of something lacking which he probably might supply. She still condemned his conduct. The renunciation of his vows had lost nothing of its horror, but she nevertheless regretted the tone she had adopted toward him. This did not arise from any self-interest. Her loneliness, her feminine weakness, and, perhaps, an unconscious longing for

sympathy, had no part in her thoughts of Lamont. She knew that she was able to stand alone, and endure, unaided if necessary, the rough usage of life. But hers was a nature quick to grasp opportunities. The significance of each moment had early been forced upon her in spite of her limited experience ; and the stern fact, that every action brings its legitimate consequence, had been learned by her long ago. It was this probable consequence which now troubled her. She did not know how her manner toward Lamont had finally affected him. She had spoken while under the influence of a powerful emotion, and naturally had spoken unwisely. Lamont, undoubtedly, had degraded himself : but she would judge him as leniently as possible ; and in the course of time, perhaps, their intercourse might be placed upon something resembling its former footing. She half hoped he would come again to see her ; but as a few days passed, and he did not appear, she became convinced that she had deeply wounded him.

Cordelia's manner would often lead one to suppose that her nature was cruel and unforgiving, but nothing could be more mistaken than this. Certainly, at times, as was evident from her conversation with Lamont, she was inflexible, and apparently merciless ; but she possessed, as well, the rare quality of being able to admit a fault.

With the full sense of this in her mind, she decided, at last, to write to Lamont, and express some slight degree of sympathy and comprehension. It was, however, not an easy task to compose a suitable letter. She feared to say too much or too little. She honestly wished to declare her conviction of having treated him with injustice ; but this was difficult, without saying more than she thought proper under the circumstances. She composed several letters, and tore each one up as it was written, instigated by the vague hope that Lamont would come, and thus render any communication from her unnecessary. The words

that can be made colorless and negative when spoken, often assume a totally opposite form when committed to paper.

But Lamont did not come. Had he really meant that he would not see her again? Was she never to have the privilege of asking his forgiveness for her hasty judgment? For the first time she realized that she had wilfully deprived herself of a friendship she would make almost any sacrifice to regain. The sense of loneliness, which she had once before experienced, crept over her again with redoubled force. Lamont's character, imperfectly comprehended hitherto, seemed all at once to stand out in bold relief, and surrounded with a halo of heroism. The knowledge that he had perhaps gone forever from her life brought with it a sudden capacity for understanding, and her naturally tender heart regarded him now more as an object of reverence than one deserving distrust and contempt. She would have given every thing she possessed to see and talk with him once more, not to confess her love, for she did not love him, but merely that she might stretch toward him the hand of friendship, — the token of mutual comprehension between honest natures.

Cordelia at this period of her life was certainly to be pitied. And yet the situation had its advantages in forcing all her individual resources upon her, and causing her to look inward for the highest incentive to right feeling and action. Hers was a strange position for one so young, and to a weaker character it might have proved fatal. But Cordelia possessed every one of those traits which enforced responsibility develops into excellence; and, before many days had elapsed, she became almost resigned to what had occurred. She no longer wished for Lamont's return, being content to regard him as an influence belonging wholly to the past, and one which, in its way, had been perfect.

Already her awakened imagination began to travel swiftly, and to throw about him an invisible web of romance. Her regrets disappeared gradually, partly because she felt she had acted throughout according to the dictates of conscience; but she could not avoid, nevertheless, a slight sense of disappointment in thinking of the unsatisfactory manner in which it had all ended. She had gained much in experience of late, and she had also paid the price which all experience demands.

Finally, however, with the firmness which was one of her most marked characteristics, she put the whole matter from her deliberately, turning her thoughts and faculties toward the future, which was bright with promise. She certainly would not become discouraged because she had committed a mistake, and borne the natural consequences. She remembered that Lamont had once said her life was yet to be lived, and this thought brought her consolation. She spent much time in making plans for the work she hoped to accomplish; but, though they afforded her a certain satisfaction, she felt the absence of an important element, — one of which, at first, she thought she could hardly deprive herself.

CHAPTER XVII.

CHRISTIAN GRATITUDE.

“In the country of the Troglodytæ there is, it is said, a river, the taste of whose waters is bitter and salt thrice a day. Then it returns to sweet again, and it is the same with it in the night-time also. Whereupon it hath gained the name of the mad river. Some men are no less unequal and inconstant in their manners than are those waters in their taste. Now courteous, and then rough; now prodigal, and straightway sordid; one while extremely kind, and ere long vehemently hating what they passionately loved before.”

LAMONT's conversation with Cordelia had greatly relieved his mind, and yet it had left him unsatisfied. The tone she had adopted toward him was not that which he had expected; and he found, that, while his general estimate of her character had not been a mistaken one, it had, nevertheless, been incomplete. He could understand in part her horror of his apostasy; and, when he considered it calmly, her reluctance to listen to the declaration of his love was, after all, but natural. At the same time, he felt she had served in a measure to increase his weight of care, instead of making it less. Her friendly sympathy seemed to have lost its genuineness; and it was evident that the few kind words she had addressed to him had been difficult of utterance, and lacking in true sentiment. This was a disappointment which made his individual sorrow harder to bear, but his clear conscience did much toward bringing him to a tranquil state of mind.

Lamont's nature was of the kind which, though con-

stantly striving toward happiness, is destined seldom to enjoy it, in consequence of the self-development which always aims, and never grasps. While waiting for a hope to become realized, his character, still unfolding, and displaying new interests, would, in time, cause his most ardent expectations to seem commonplace; and he would straightway allow his ambition to lead him to yet higher regions with an identical result. And, indeed, what can be more disappointing than to discover, on reaching a long-sought-for goal, that one has outgrown it in the journey?

When he left the convent, and walked mechanically along the path where, but a short time before, he had stood irresolute, endeavoring to summon all his energy for the coming interview with Cordelia, he wondered vaguely whether she would ever view his conduct in a different and better light. He knew that her thoughts and feelings were not, at present, absolutely under her control; but her conduct, nevertheless, had somewhat shaken his faith in her. He could not avoid dwelling persistently upon her unsympathetic words, and thinking how differently she might have spoken. But he soon cast this aside as selfish, and unworthy of his love.

Lamont drew a wide distinction between the non-suppression of self in regard to duties imposed by conscience for the production of certain good results, and the mere individual interest which a love less perfect than his is apt to seek. What he desired was the highest moral excellence for himself, which by proper cultivation could not fail likewise to benefit others with whom he came in contact, or who were by chance exposed to his influence. Infinitely did he regret the loss of that mutual aid which he and Cordelia had formerly given to each other, for his friendship was no less sincere than his love. The latter, he felt, imposed certain obligations upon him, no weaker in their way than those which had drawn him from the

Church ; and hoping to gain much from them, in spite of the absence of reciprocation on Cordelia's part, he resolved to let this love be, as it were, the mainspring of his life.

Several days later, an irresistible impulse carried him to the cathedral. Why he went there, he scarcely knew ; but, as he entered the building, the impressive service, which was being celebrated, touched him profoundly. He stood near the doorway unobserved, and let his eyes wander, with a sense of combined relief and sadness, toward the altar. The church was filled with Mexicans, whose swarthy faces looked more sombre still in the dusky light. As Lamont glanced at them, he felt a vague regret that he was no longer to be the means of improving their ignorant condition by teaching them the higher requirements of their faith. They were now to be confided to other hands, — hands which, it is true, placed a greater value upon symbols than upon the things they represented, but which at the same time could not fail to raise those wretched souls from their degradation. An opportunity had here been lost, and he doubted for the moment whether any other could replace it.

Presently his gaze rested upon the Bishop, who was reciting the mass in a sing-song tone, with folded hands and half-closed eyes. One would hardly have recognized his face as being the same which Lamont had seen a few days before. He watched him now, with a sort of fascination, his figure clearly defined against the background of lighted candles and artificial flowers, the large ruby upon his finger emitting sparks of lurid crimson, and the gold cloth of his robe glistening as he swayed backward and forward with every utterance. Once in a while his eyes would open languidly, and sweep the congregation with a quick, furtive glance ; but, when the lids drooped again, nothing could be more peaceful than his expression. La-

mont involuntarily recalled his words, "What if I should publicly announce your degradation?" but he had little fear that the Bishop would really do this. Even had he done so, it would not have served to intimidate him. Having undergone so much, it mattered little whether or not an additional trial were added to his burden. But he wondered dimly what the effect of his disgrace would be upon the people. Toleration from them was scarcely to be expected. Incapable of gratitude, governed by violent passions, and endowed with intelligence but little above that of brutes, it was not difficult to foretell their feelings when they should become aware of what had happened. Perhaps already the knowledge of his shame had transpired. Again he looked at the congregation, and then at the Bishop, who was still reciting the prayers in a dull, monotonous voice. Lamont was too far back in the church for the Bishop to see him; but he felt instinctively as if the prelate's penetrating glance had discovered him, even among the shadows where he lingered. In a few moments the people fell upon their knees to receive the benediction, and mechanically he followed their example. The impressiveness of the scene, with its semi-barbaric picturesqueness, was not lost upon his vivid fancy,—the Bishop's firm, deliberate voice, his peaceful, resigned manner, the quaint surroundings of form, color, and light, the faces of the people, almost identical in expression and general outline, and, last of all, Lamont himself, kneeling in the obscurity, his gaze fixed upon the altar where he would never again officiate, and upon the ecclesiastical robes which he had worn for the last time. How strange a scene, indeed, was this! From the tiny windows high up in the wall, near the roof, came miniature flecks of sunshine, which fell here and there like golden spangles. Some touched the garments of the kneeling figures, and made little patches of bright color; a few danced on the

altar, above which the incongruously dressed dolls sat, and seemed to survey the scene intelligently ; others chased each other up and down the Bishop's robe, one resting, perchance, now and then, upon the fiery ruby, which shone in the gloom like the eye of an evil beast.

Lamont, upon his knees, his hands folded across his breast, heard not the prayers, nor was he conscious that the Bishop had finally ceased speaking, until the latter, having concluded the service, walked solemnly into the sacristy, and the people rose to their feet. Even then he remained kneeling, and absorbed in his own reflections, from which he was presently roused by the subdued clamor of voices. The congregation, on turning to leave the church, had recognized the face of their former priest and friend, and, like most people, were only too willing to help him in his descent of the ladder of life.

Lamont left the building in a few moments, and walked slowly through the *plaza*, his head bowed upon his chest, his hands now crossed behind him, his whole attitude bespeaking profound thought not unmixed with sadness. He did not hear the muttered curses of the people, or notice the scowling glances which they cast upon him as they hurried by, gathering the folds of their *serapes* and *rebosas* closely about them, as if in fear of being contaminated by touching the apostate. At the angle of the *plaza*, toward which Lamont directed his steps, was a high, white-washed *adobe* wall ; and in front of it, seated on the ground, were a dozen or more Mexicans, men and women, basking in the warm sunlight. Had he chosen to look at this motley group, he would have seen that several of the persons therein were those whom he had especially befriended in various ways, and who had hitherto professed the greatest love and veneration for him. There, for instance, was old Juan Trujillo, whose whole family, lately stricken by small-pox, had been nursed by the priest, and supplied with

the necessities and comforts which had brought them through their dangerous illness. And, again, there was Jesusa Chavez, a tall, well-made girl, to whom Lamont had given a marriage portion from his own scanty income, in order that she might set up a shop with her husband. Francisco Garcia, too, who had stabbed a man in a quarrel, and whose acquittal had been obtained by Lamont on the ground of self-defence, formed likewise one of the party, and looked at his former pastor with a black and angry frown. He sat a little apart from the others, surrounded by a throng of *muchachos* and *muchachas* (boys and girls), whom the priest had not only striven to instruct in the rudiments of Christianity, but also to imbue their minds with a just appreciation of the morality which accompanies proper self-respect. All the services rendered by him to the people had been, as is generally the case, forgotten as soon as enjoyed. The recollection of a benefit received was not a familiar sensation with them; but, even had it been otherwise, the insult offered by Lamont to the Church would have caused his most noble acts to sink into insignificance.

Francisco rose suddenly to his feet, and pointed his finger at Lamont, the act causing all eyes to be directed toward the latter. "There he is!" he cried. "Look, here comes the apostate!"

His exclamation seemed to rouse within the people the slumbering sense of the wrong done to them and the Church.

"Ay!" screamed an old woman named Antonia Vaca, whose face was whitened with plaster, and whose black eyes sparkled with fury, "he struck his Holy Reverence, the Bishop, yesterday, and kicked, besides, the image of the Blessed Virgin. Maria Arimjo, who takes care of his rooms, told me so herself. No wonder my goats would give no milk this morning. We shall all be ruined if this

traidor, this *apostatá*, be allowed to remain in Santa Fe. He is worse than the cursed Americans."

"*Carajo!*" said a cadaverous-looking man, who, as he spoke, began to roll a cigarette between his dirty fingers. "The Señora Antonia is right. A black dog rushed into my house to-day, and ate all the *tortillas* just as I was sitting down to breakfast. Such things do not happen for nothing. We shall be *malditos* if we suffer this fellow to stay another night in Santa Fe. *Vamos Amigos!*" he continued, as he rose from the ground, "let us drive him out now. Jesus, Maria, Jose!" he called in a loud tone, "pray for us, your defenders. Is not this San Diego's day?" he added, half to himself. "*En buen dia, buenas obras.*" ("The better the day, the better the work.") He turned away with a harsh laugh, and, chipping a piece of plaster from the wall, threw it with all his strength at Lamont, who was about ten feet distant.

The latter, who had raised his head on hearing the shrill voices about him, was in a measure prepared for the attack, and stepped hastily aside, so that the piece of *adobe* went whirling by, and fell to the ground several yards behind him.

"Friends," he said, in a loud, clear tone, his frank glance meeting their fierce, angry looks, "why do you use this violence toward me? Have I done aught to you to deserve it?"

His calm, grave voice seemed only to enrage them the more; and he saw at once how powerless he was to fight against them. In a frenzy of excitement, and uttering the while harsh, inarticulate cries, they seized, one and all, upon every thing nearly that could possibly serve as a missile to hurl at Lamont.

"Jesus — Maria!" cried one, fairly trembling with rage, "We care not what he says, and we will listen to none of his words. But he shall see whether or not he can insult

the saints as he pleases. There is a devil behind every cross, but this one shall not remain behind ours."

"Kill him! kill the apostate!" shrieked old Antonia, jumping off both feet at once. "My goats will give no milk, and I am a ruined woman. It is not at my age that one submits to be cursed."

"Look you at his eyes!" exclaimed another woman, who had a naked child clinging to her skirts. "They are filled with imps. I can see them dance. Out with them!" she cried, picking up a piece of *adobe* from the ground. "Run, Juanita, and fetch me some more," she added, thrusting the child from her: "we are *malditos, malditos!*"

Already several stones and pieces of plaster had struck Lamont. Twice he had tried to speak again, half hoping that the sound of his voice, and the words he would address to the people, might calm their wild excitement. But his utterance was drowned by their shouts, and his efforts to command attention unnoticed.

"Out with the apostate!" cried Francisco Garcia. "We want no devils in Santa Fe!" He ran toward Lamont as he spoke, followed by the others, who still continued to throw at him every thing upon which they could lay their hands. Lamont, his pale face more sorrowful than angry, his clothes soiled with plaster, in vain sought escape from his tormentors. He began to feel weak from the effects of the blows he had received, and from the loss of blood which flowed from his forehead, where a sharp piece of *adobe*, thrown by old Antonia, had struck him. But still they pursued him without mercy, filling the air with curses, and shrill cries of rage, as he rushed hastily across the *plaza* seeking protection.

The bright noonday sunlight streamed into his eyes, and almost blinded him, for his hat had been lost in the affray; but he went bravely on, hoping to reach his own dwelling before any serious injury was done him. A dull red color

had risen to the faces of most of the Mexicans, imbuing them with a fiery animation ; and their movements were not devoid of the grace which results from the utter abandonment and forgetfulness of self. It was the unconscious ease of the savage bent on securing his prey. As they advanced, many, finding their *serapes* and *rebosas* inconvenient, cast them recklessly aside ; so that they lay upon the ground, forming at various intervals brilliant patches of color on the rough earth.

At the entrance of the *plaza*, Lamont, rushing blindly forward, failed to see the forms of two women who were coming from the opposite direction. A Mexican behind him gave him a sudden vigorous push, which almost threw him upon his face. Then raising his head, and looking from side to side as though in search of a path of escape, Lamont became conscious of the presence of Cordelia, who was standing before him, with the Superior by her side.

The people, recognizing them both, suddenly stopped ; and in an instant the wild tumult of voices was hushed. Some looked half ashamed, and all seemed impressed with a slight sense of the outrage perpetrated upon their former priest. Many hardly dared to meet the full, inquiring glance of Cordelia's eyes ; and for a few seconds no one spoke.

Lamont, panting with fatigue and pain, stood bare-headed in the sunlight, and looked at Cordelia unflinchingly ; while a feeling almost of satisfaction came over him. The Superior, her lips curled in a meaning smile, measured first the Mexicans and then Lamont with a calm, deliberate glance. Then she shrugged her shoulders, and turned her eyes away to another point. Cordelia was the first to break the painful silence. "Tell me," she said, advancing toward Lamont, "what all this means. What are these people doing here, and why are you in such a

condition?" Evidently she knew what the answer would be; for her face had grown very pale, and her eyes were filled with tears. The Superior bent forward, and laid her arm across the girl's shoulder.

"It is not proper for you to remain here," she said. "What would you do among these people? Let us go."

"Can they have used violence toward you?" Cordelia continued, not noticing the Superior's words. "Tell us quickly, I implore you." She stretched her hand toward Lamont with a gesture of ready sympathy.

"It is nothing of importance," said Lamont, trying to speak calmly. "And do not trouble yourself, Miss Héricourt; for it matters little what becomes of me. As well be stoned to death now, as to be an outcast forever from all that makes life worth having. Forgive me," he added hastily. "I am not unmindful of your kindness; but if you only knew how little I value existence" — He hesitated, and then continued more slowly, "I think, if they would have consented to listen to me, I might have escaped this degradation. But they would not. I have no longer any influence over them."

"Cowards!" cried Cordelia, with flashing eyes, "do you see what you have done? Is this your gratitude? Who has been to you so good a friend as he? Oh!" she added vehemently, "I wish I were a man. And were my father still alive" — Tears choked her utterance; and she turned aside, to lean her head against the Superior's shoulder.

"Come away," whispered the latter. "Indeed, you must not stay here, Cordelia. You will regret having delayed so long. Pray come."

"*Carajo!*" said Francisco Garcia, twisting his fingers nervously together. "We cannot be cursed with impunity. You do not know, Señorita, all the ill that has befallen us since Padre Lamont turned *apostatá*. But I

can see the good mother yonder knows of it, and does not blame us. Tell about your goats, Antonia; and you, Jose, relate the story of the black dog and the *tortillas*. You will say, Señorita, that we are right."

"Be off!" cried Cordelia imperiously. "I will hear none of your absurd superstitions. How dared you attack him? O mother!" she added, with a fresh burst of tears, "speak to them. They will heed your words better than mine."

"I have said that we have no place here," replied the Superior in a low tone, and looking coldly at Lamont. "Why do you not come away as I have asked you?"

"No, no! not yet. I will not go, mother," replied Cordelia, trembling. She was both horrified and amazed at the indignity offered to Lamont; and her sensations were doubtless intensified, both by the part she had played in their last interview, and her subsequent reflections. It almost seemed as if she were personally responsible for what had just occurred; and the tears she shed were rather of remorse than of compassion, though her sorrow was sincere.

Lamont, apparently, was hardly conscious of what passed in her mind. There was a certain dignity in his manner, which lent additional pathos to the situation; and, although he was painfully aware of every detail that had happened, he was in no wise ashamed to be seen by Cordelia in his present position.

There was silence between them all for some moments. The Superior, seeing that Cordelia was bent upon remaining, had drawn herself up to her full height, and now stood with a malicious smile playing about her lips, her whole demeanor bespeaking a cruel enjoyment of the former priest's injuries. Lamont's glance, in the meanwhile, wandered down the narrow street which bordered the *plaza*, the low houses on each side allowing a broad

expanse of deep-blue sky to be seen. Occasionally a Mexican wearing a wide-brimmed *sombrero*, or a woman with a *rebosa* closely covering her head, would pass by with a lazy, listless gait, and look curiously, through half-closed eyes, at the strange group assembled. One or two new-comers joined the Mexicans already there, and inquired in loud whispers what had happened; but, generally speaking, it was too great an exertion, even to do this.

"I think," said Lamont, breaking the stillness finally, with apparent effort, "that I need fear no further violence from these people. Your timely arrival, Miss Héricourt, has probably saved my life; and I am grateful to you for your generous intercedence. See," he added, turning to the Mexicans, "the trouble and fear you have brought upon these ladies; and tell me, besides, what I have ever done to you to merit such treatment at your hands? It is true, that I have left the Church; but my reasons for so doing would not be understood by you. Yet, even if I have changed toward the Church, to you I have not changed. I have not cared for you, taught you, and sympathized with you, for so many months, to wish you any ill now. Have I ever been other than a friend to you? Answer me, Garcia, and you too, Jose."

"You struck His Reverence," cried old Antonia, upon whom Lamont's words made little impression. "You kicked the image of the Blessed Virgin."

"Ay!" exclaimed another. "We were forced into it. We cannot submit to be ruined."

"My teaching has indeed brought forth imperfect fruit," said Lamont. "I see now how little I have really done. It is as well, therefore, that I leave you all." He turned as if to walk away, but Cordelia detained him.

"Wait a moment," she began, in a low, quick tone. "I have been unkind and harsh to you, but I will be so no longer. We used to be friends; let us be friends again."

She held out her hand, and Lamont clasped it in his. Something like a mist came over his eyes.

"I thank you," he said, "but I have troubled you too long already with my presence. It will be better for me to go as quietly as possible to my own house. See, some of my persecutors have gone away; and the others, I am sure, will do me no further injury." He turned aside, advanced a few steps, and paused. "Do not think me ungrateful," he said gently. "I appreciate your kind words more than I can say."

Cordelia was silent, overcome by a strong emotion. The Superior watched him as he walked away with difficulty, and her malicious smile changed to a heavy frown.

"Come, now," she said, "you have no reason to stay any longer."

The Mexicans stood for a few moments gazing also at the retreating figure of their former priest. Then they dispersed quietly, picking up, as they went, the *rebosas* and *serapes* which lay scattered on the *plaza*.

Lamont continued his way slowly; the sunlight falling in golden warmth upon his torn clothes, and displaying the pallor of his blood-stained face. He made a strange, unnatural figure, this disgraced priest upon whom the people had just wreaked their vengeance. The brilliant day seemed likewise to mock at his misery. There was no friendly shadow, such as had come to his aid in the cathedral,—no sudden obscuring of the summer sky. The yellow sunbeams danced upon his hair, his ragged garments, and his face, as though enjoying his suffering.

Cordelia, her eyes still filled with tears, stood by the Superior's side, and watched him until he reached his own house, and entered the narrow doorway.

Then the two women turned also away from the now deserted *plaza*, and, arm in arm, walked back to the convent.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SUPERIOR.

“Un acte de vertu, un sacrifice ou de ses intérêts ou de soi-même, est le besoin d’une âme noble.” — CHAMFORT.

WHEN Cordelia reached Our Lady of Gaudaloupe, she shut herself in her room, overcome by nervous excitement and distress. The scene she had just witnessed, intense in its reality, had affected her in more ways than one. Apart from her physical sensations were others of a different character. Her pity for Lamont was redoubled tenfold, and it was not devoid of tenderness. The few words she had spoken to the Mexicans had been uttered with the sense of responsibility which her freshly awakened friendship called forth. Her own harshness sank into nothingness beside the cruelty of the people, and the sight of Lamont’s suffering had thoroughly unnerved her. It is true that her apology to him had cost her a slight effort; but it was one worth the making, she thought, upon reflection.

As soon as she was somewhat composed, she sat down, and wrote a long and sympathetic letter to Lamont, confessing frankly all the thoughts which had occurred to her since their last interview, and revealing the changed state of her feelings toward him. It was, however, a purely friendly letter, exhibiting a great deal of the unselfishness which should have been forthcoming earlier. It relieved

her to write it; and, on looking at the closely worded sheets, she wondered whether Lamont, on receiving them, would experience half the satisfaction she felt at that moment.

A gentle knock at the door interrupted her occupation, and the Superior entered. Cordelia rose quickly, and placed a chair for her beside the table. The Superior sank down upon the seat, with a long-drawn sigh.

"You were writing, my child. Do I disturb you?" she asked softly.

"No, mother. I was writing a few moments ago, but I have finished. Besides, the matter is not very pressing."

The Superior glanced at the sheets of paper, and then at Cordelia. The light striking her face revealed a rather careworn expression, and deep lines on the forehead and about the mouth.

"Were you — were you writing to *him*?" she inquired presently, with hesitation.

"Yes, mother," Cordelia answered readily. "If you only knew how I pity him, — how I long to be of service to him. He has been our friend, my friend, for so long." She abruptly ceased speaking, and toyed nervously with the pen she held between her fingers.

The Superior raised both hands, as though to shut some horrible vision from her sight. "Do not call him friend!" she exclaimed. "He can have no claim to that title, if you are what you profess to be. I am disappointed in you, Cordelia. You have acted improperly from beginning to end. You have disregarded my advice repeatedly, and you will never be able to reconcile your behavior with your conscience. You are scarcely like the Cordelia Héricourt I have known and loved."

"I am sorry to have been forced to disobey you, mother; but I have done no wrong," said Cordelia in a low tone,

“except, indeed, to treat him with injustice when I should have given him sympathy.”

“Sympathy!” cried the Superior. “For what does he deserve it? But I see how it is,” she added: “the interview which you insisted upon having has done its work, as I knew it would. Are you willing to sacrifice your principles for the sake of this man,—for the sake of a romantic and silly attachment?”

“It is neither romantic nor silly,” said Cordelia firmly. “I feel that I have been unjust to Lamont, and my desire is to make amends. In the beginning, I had only condemnation for his conduct; but I see now, that many things are to be considered apart from the action itself.”

“Do you think, that, with your limited knowledge and experience, you are competent to judge the matter at all?” inquired the Superior, almost shrilly.

“I have reason, at all events,” said Cordelia; “and Padre Lamont was a true friend to me. My ideas, no doubt, differ from yours; but I am sure I am taking the proper course.”

“Come,” said the Superior more gently, “let us talk calmly about it. I am much older than you, and I have studied human nature as well as other things. You think Padre Lamont a paragon of excellence, simply because he has known how to play upon your sensibilities to his own advantage. Had you not listened to him,—had you received his explanations and advances properly,—you would have escaped this shame; for I can call it nothing else. Can a priest assume vows, only to cast them aside when it pleases him to do so?” She rose as she spoke, and began to pace the floor impatiently.

“No,” said Cordelia, “but surely circumstances alter cases. I do not deny that what Lamont has done is a great shock to me, but I now think his motives were honestly conceived. The Church will mourn his loss; but

an unprejudiced mind, and one who understands his character, must see that he has done well to leave a sphere of life to which he was unsuited. His place, I fear, has not been among us for some time. But, whether in the Church or not, he will put forth his best efforts in all he may undertake." She spoke warmly, and a faint color came into her cheeks.

"I do not understand you," said the Superior, with dignified coldness. "In your position you should be as much horrified as I, — perhaps more so."

"Tell me, mother," said Cordelia, almost vehemently, "why, when you adopt that black gown, must you cast aside every independent thought? You will find nowhere," she added quickly, "a more consistent and devout worshipper than I, but religion cannot bind my reason. It is my life now, my happiness, my hope; but I am no bigot."

"You speak falsely when you say it is all this!" exclaimed the Superior passionately. "It should be first with you always, but you have made it second. Your actual religion is your feeling for this wretched apostate. You are not a good Catholic. I can scarcely believe you to be really Cordelia Héricourt."

"Well, have it so, if you will," said Cordelia, speaking for the first time in anger. "You are bent upon misunderstanding me, so it is useless to say more. Oh!" she added sadly, "how hard it is sometimes to know how to act!" Tears rose to her eyes, but she brushed them impatiently away. "Forgive me," she said, seeing the Superior preserve a stony silence. "I did not mean to offend you, mother. But I pity Lamont, the more inasmuch as I think he will never know perfect happiness. A commonplace nature only can accept whatever comes and enjoy it. The uninquiring mind, living within a narrow circumference, and taking all in good faith and without

questions, is happy in its ignorance and restriction, and gets real pleasure out of existence. But is Lamont of this kind? Has he not desires, and, above all, principles, which give him no peace?"

"So have I; so have we all," said the Superior, seating herself again by the table, and looking keenly at Cordelia. "But principles, to be really such, cannot change. They are as firm as rocks, and as deeply rooted as trees."

"True," said Cordelia, "but only when a nature has completed its growth. It is like a soil which brings forth nothing but weeds until a proper amount of cultivation causes a finer vegetation to spring up."

"But is not the change, even then, a gradual one?" asked the Superior, with some trace of her former excitement. "So wonderful a metamorphosis as to sentiments and ideas can hardly occur in a man's character all at once. A month ago Lamont seemed wrapped up in his faith, and the work to which he had been appointed. No one, apparently, was more sincere than he."

"I think that, like many others, he was reluctant to acknowledge his steady pursuance of a false track," said Cordelia. "He tried to hide the truth from himself, probably, until it refused longer to be concealed. Then he acted as his honesty prompted."

The Superior made no reply. It was far from her intention to quarrel with Cordelia, for reasons which will be revealed later; but she felt, nevertheless, that great personal sacrifices should be made in order to keep the girl's faith and principles intact.

"After all," said Cordelia presently, "there is no reason to be worried about me, mother. I do not think Lamont will remain much longer in Santa Fe, and probably I shall never see him again. But throughout my life I shall carry with me the recollection of him as he stood this morning in the *plaza*, surrounded by those dreadful Mexicans, his

clothes torn, his face pale, and stained with blood. Did not the spectacle move you?"

"The people did what they thought right," answered the Superior stiffly. "It was a just punishment."

"It was cruel, — barbarous," cried Cordelia tremulously. "Oh! why are you so hard, — so unjust, — so wanting in womanly feeling?"

"I respect the Church and myself," said the Superior, unmoved; "and your tone is lacking in respect, Cordelia. But, as you say, there is no occasion for this argument. Lamont is going away, and you will never see him again. You have much for which to be thankful. Once removed from his influence, your heart will regain its proper sentiments, and you will see the matter in a different light. I shall leave you in a few moments, to reflect upon what I have said. Take my advice, however, and do not send that letter. It can do no good. You think me harsh and unkind, but some day you will be grateful for my words and the efforts I have made in your behalf. This man is not worth the interest you lavish upon him; and soon you will forget, as I have done, that you ever called him friend. You have much also that is noble and elevated to occupy your mind. Think of the work you contemplate, and let all worldly and selfish feelings die out. Vulgar friendships, and the companionship of perverted minds, are not for you, Cordelia; and I will do all in my power to shield you from them. Your thoughts should be far removed from these things."

Cordelia shook her head.

"I must send the letter," she said firmly. "I cannot let him go without a word of sympathy. The matter, however, shall end there, I promise you."

"You are a wilful girl; but you must have your own way, I suppose," said the Superior, half fearing she had gone too far. "We all love you here, and will do what we

can for your happiness and welfare. Perhaps I have been a little hasty, both to you and this misguided priest; but you understand, I hope, that I have your well-being at heart."

"Thank you, mother," said Cordelia. "I am sorry to do any thing of which you disapprove; but my duty, I think, is clearly marked out for me."

"At least, you will not attempt to see him again," said the Superior anxiously. "Let me dictate a letter for you instead of the one you intend to send." She thrust her hand into her pocket, and drew forth a handkerchief, three keys, a spool of thread, a candle-end, and finally a blunted lead-pencil. "I know what is best to say," she added, drawing toward her a sheet of paper, and beginning to write a few words.

"No, mother," Cordelia interrupted, placing her hand gently but firmly upon the Superior's. "Let me say what pleases me. My letter is written. I will send that and no other."

The Superior reluctantly restored the pencil and other articles to her pocket. "Very well," she said, in a disappointed tone. "You have a strong will, Cordelia; and I pray that it may never bring you into trouble."

She rose as she finished speaking, straightening her tall figure with a dignified movement. "You are a foolish girl, and some day you will discover it. Send your letter, by all means, but be prepared for the consequences."

She left the room, gathering about her the long folds of her black gown; her large flat feet, incased in cloth slippers, treading the floor heavily.

Cordelia placed her letter hurriedly in an envelope, and wrote the address in rather trembling characters, while she sent for a Mexican who was in the habit of doing errands for the convent. She would have liked to tell the messenger to wait for an answer; but thinking that this

might, perhaps, occasion a hasty and unreflecting response, she gave orders that the letter was merely to be left at Lamont's lodgings.

Her friendship naturally had only been intensified by the opposition she had met with from the Superior, but mingled with the feeling was a certain amount of humiliation. She knew that hitherto she had imperfectly understood the term friendship, for she experienced now the unquestioning devotion of entire confidence. It was not a blind faith based upon ignorance, but that which comes from knowledge acquired by means of trial and investigation, and which is based upon pure reason. She was too young yet to go very deeply into the study of character; and she had consequently accepted Lamont just as he had appeared to her, without attempting to analyze the undercurrent of his nature. She rarely discovered any thing by the intuition which often passes for practice and observation; but, in thinking of Lamont, her intelligence unconsciously came uppermost. Much was still wanting to complete her friendship. The necessary equality between herself and him was not perfect; and, without this, no absolute friendship could exist. Few natures at any time comprehend this, and Cordelia certainly did not. She knew instinctively that Lamont was her superior, and she felt a lack of ease when speaking or writing to him; but she was his friend according to her best conception of the word.

She sat lost in thought where the Superior had left her: her arms rested upon the table, and her face was bowed upon them. What would be the answer to her letter, she wondered. She hardly expected to see Lamont again, and yet to do so would give her unalloyed pleasure. Again her thoughts reverted to the scene in the *plaza*; and old Antonia's shrill tones came back to her, with the scowling glances of the people. She recalled, too, Lamont's

figure standing boldly out from the rest in the noonday sunlight ; and here her reflections lingered. So she remained motionless for over an hour, when she was roused from her reverie by the entrance of the Superior, who held a letter in her hand.

"Here is the answer, Cordelia," she said briefly.

The girl took it, and broke the seal silently, the Superior watching her with an affected indifference hardly in keeping with the keen sparkle of her small black eyes. The note contained only a few hastily written lines.

"I thank you," it read, "for your kindness and sympathy, which are of great value to me. You know with how much pleasure I would see you again, but I wish to avoid every suspicion which would lead to the belief that I had left the Church solely on your account. You understand this, I am sure. I shall remain but a day or two longer in Santa Fe, and it may be that we shall never meet again. It encourages me to think that I carry away with me your best wishes for my happiness, and the earnest assurance of your friendship."

Then followed an additional sentence or two, referring to her own interests, and expressing the hope that she would find therein the satisfaction she desired.

It was not altogether a cold letter, and yet it was a bitter disappointment to her. Perhaps Lamont, fearing to say too much, had failed to give the full significance of his thoughts. At any rate, it seemed to Cordelia that a cruel blow had been dealt her. The sheet dropped from her hands upon the table, and she sat staring at it blankly. She knew the Superior was regarding her with mingled impatience and curiosity, but she was unable to speak. She realized now that Lamont had gone forever from her life, and that henceforth he was to be a memory, and nothing more. Hot tears rose to her eyes ; but she brushed them away, unwilling to let the Superior witness them.

Presently the older woman bent forward, and laid her hand on Cordelia's shoulder.

"Well, my child?" she asked, in a tone of subdued excitement, which the girl failed to notice.

"It is nothing, mother, — nothing," she answered abstractedly. "I shall not see him again. He leaves Santa Fe immediately. You have no cause for alarm."

The Superior's face brightened perceptibly, and she drew a long breath of relief.

"Heaven be praised!" she exclaimed fervently. "Ah! my child, you see God wills all things for the best. The influence of this man would, in a short time, be fatal to you; but now the danger is passed. A little later you would have been powerless to escape it." She laid her arm caressingly about the girl's shoulders. "You bear me no ill will, I hope," she continued. "I did my duty toward you and him. I could not sit calmly by, and see you plunge unknowingly into destruction. We will think no more of this man, — this degraded priest. He is not worth the attention of an honest Catholic."

Cordelia was quite willing that the Superior should take all the credit to herself. She only raised her head wearily, and said, "We do not quite agree about it yet, mother; but it is not worth while to speak of it any longer. As for what you did and said, you acted, I suppose, as your conscience dictated; and therefore I cannot blame you." She was evidently anxious to dismiss the subject. The Superior hesitated for a moment, and then turned to leave the room.

"I shall send Sister Josefa to you," she said, standing in the doorway. "You have no light, and it is growing dark. Besides, her conversation will cheer you."

"I do not care to see Sister Josefa," replied Cordelia, and I prefer to be in the dark." But her words were spoken to the empty air, for the Superior had gone.

The girl rose hurriedly to her feet, and, advancing toward the door, turned the key in the lock. Then she sat down again by the table, and, clasping Lamont's letter in her hands, burst into a passion of tears.

CHAPTER XIX.

BILL TAYLOR SPEAKS.

“Some of those who call themselves humble resemble Diogenes, whose pride was seen through the holes in his cloak.” — HELVETIUS.

FOR some time after Lamont had left Santa Fe, Cordelia remained at Our Lady of Guadalupe, waiting patiently for news of Miss Héricourt, and definite knowledge about the money. The Superior, who had her own plans, showed great interest in the matter, treating the girl with a half-deferential tenderness, which to a less innocent nature would have been full of significance.

However, when the stage-coach driven by Bill Taylor returned to the city about a month after its departure, the intelligence of the supposed death of Mrs. Aldergrove during the journey was instantly spread abroad, and produced not a little excitement. The military governor at once sent out messengers to several bands of friendly Navajos and Apaches, offering magnificent rewards, in those goods which Indians prize, for any news of the missing woman, and still greater treasures for her restoration to her friends. Cordelia, naturally, was one of the last to hear of what had occurred. It was not until late in the evening that a sister came to tell her a man was at the convent-door inquiring for Miss Aldergrove.

“Miss Aldergrove!” Cordelia repeated in astonishment. “There must be some mistake.”

"So I told him," the sister answered; "but he insisted that Miss Aldergrove was here, and said he wished to speak with her about her relatives."

Cordelia descended the stairs, filled with a vague apprehension. As she entered the small reception-room, a man advanced from a corner in which he was seated, and, hat in hand, addressed her.

"My name is Taylor, — William Taylor, — better known as Bill Taylor, Miss," he said with deference. "And, you see, I drives a coach from here to Independence and back; and we took over some kin of yours last trip."

"Yes," said Cordelia, "that is true; but my name is not Aldergrove."

"Not Aldergrove?" echoed Taylor. "Why, wa'n't them ladies your aunt and cousins?"

"They were related to me," said Cordelia, "but you seem to have mixed the names. Mine is Héricourt."

"Oh, well! the name don't matter so long as it's one on 'em," said Taylor, looking relieved. "Aldergrove or Héricourt, it's all the same. Two of the ladies was as much alike as any two peas, and you and t'other one couldn't be told apart nohow. I never saw any thing like it, never!"

"My aunt and one of my cousins resemble each other very much," said Cordelia, still in some surprise.

"That they did, Miss; and, for the life of me, I don't know to this day which one on 'em it was. I hope," he added, seeing her look at him inquiringly, "as how you won't think we was to blame. Why, bless your soul, Miss! we went back, and buscard (looked) around for ever so long; though there was Indian trails all about us."

"I don't think I quite understand," said Cordelia: "were you menaced by the Indians?"

"I don't know nothin' about menacing," said Taylor bluntly; "and, Lord, Miss! you must excuse me, but

I would swear anywhere as you was the young lady I drove from here to Independence."

"Yes, yes," interrupted Cordelia hastily; "but please tell me why you are here. What have you come to tell me?"

"Why, you see, Miss, the Professor gave me a letter for you," said Taylor, fumbling in his pocket. "I'd almost forgot about it, but here it is. You know Professor Hoveden, Miss?"

"I have seen him," answered Cordelia; "but why should he write to me?"

"He's a fine gentleman, he is," said Bill Taylor musingly. "When the accident happened" —

"Accident!" exclaimed Cordelia, turning pale. "What do you mean?"

"It's all here, I guess, Miss. The Professor writ this 'ere letter in Independence, and told me to carry it back to Santa Fe to Miss Aldergrove. And a heap of trouble I've had, too, in findin' you; and you say you're not Miss Aldergrove neither."

"Never mind," said Cordelia, tearing open the letter with trembling fingers. "Professor Hoveden has mistaken the name, but it makes no difference." She walked to the table, where a lamp was burning. The uncertain, flickering light fell upon the sheet, which was worn and discolored from long acquaintance with Taylor's pocket. It was written in unformed characters, and bore evidence of having been hastily penned. It ran thus:—

DEAR MISS ALDERGROVE, — It is my sad duty to inform you, that a terrible accident occurred to us three days after leaving Santa Fe. One of the ladies who had placed themselves in my care during the journey, mysteriously disappeared during the night; and it is supposed that she fell out of the stage while asleep, or that she jumped out while dreaming. This lady, dear Miss Aldergrove, was your esteemed mother; and her loss has been mourned by your relatives, and the members of our party, as much, I might almost say, as it will be by

you. I need not tell you, that search was made everywhere for her. Unfortunately, our investigations but confirmed the suspicion previously conceived, that she had been carried off by the Indians, who were known to be in the neighborhood. This sad occurrence has thrown gloom upon us all, and I beg herewith to tender you my warmest sympathy in your great affliction. Your aunt and cousin bear up bravely under their trial, and have displayed throughout great courage and fortitude; but it is easy to see that this new sorrow, following so soon upon the recent death of Major Héricourt, has produced a powerful and melancholy effect upon them. I was told by Miss Héricourt, that you had remained in Santa Fe; and it is by her request that I write.

With renewed sympathy and great respect,

I remain, dear Miss Aldergrove,

Truly yours,

JULIUS HOVEDEN.

P.S. — Should you at any time be in need of my services, my New-York address is 100 Pine Street. I beg that you will command me if necessary.

An exclamation escaped Cordelia's lips as she finished reading, and the sheet dropped from her hand to the floor. Bill Taylor, whose glance meanwhile had wandered about the room, now looked at her with an expression of interest.

"I suppose, Miss, he tells you how it all happened?" he said interrogatively.

"No," Cordelia answered mechanically: "he gives none of the particulars, except to say that my cousin fell or jumped out of the stage during the night. It is terrible."

"Your cousin! Oh, yes, Miss! I remember you said your name was Héricourt. It's perfectly ridiculous, — the likeness, I mean," said Taylor hastily, fearing she might think he referred to the accident. "You see, Miss," he added, "it happened in the night, while everybody was asleep except me. The horses was just a-goin' it; and their feet made such a noise on the road, that I couldn't have heard any thing short of a thunder-clap. The first thing I

knowed about it was when the two ladies began to shriek and yell in the morning. I thought they saw Indians, and was scared, I'll admit. I stopped the stage, jumped down, and ran round to the back where the ladies was. The gentlemen were all awake, and followed me. When we reached the ladies' compartment, — they was separated from the other passengers by a thick buffalo-robe, — there was Miss Héricourt, and the young lady who looks like you, a-starin' at an empty seat, as if they seed a ghost. They was just so frightened they couldn't speak, and I don't wonder at it; for t'other lady — Mrs. Aldergrove — was clean gone. There wa'n't no sign of her anywhere." Taylor paused to observe the effect of his narrative. Cordelia did not speak, but she motioned to him to continue.

"Of course," he said, "we was a'most paralyzed. We couldn't think, to save us, where on earth the lady had gone. The only thing she could ha' done was to fall out or jump out. There was a high back to the stage, fastened by straps; so she couldn't ha' got out over that."

"And that was the only way?" asked Cordelia, almost breathlessly.

"No, Miss. The side of the stage had a curtain on to it, and this 'ere curtain had been rolled up to let the air in. The only thing between the lady and the road was a strap, about four or five inches above the seat where she sat."

"Could she have fallen out over that?"

"Well, yes, she might, Miss; although the strap would be liable to break. It wasn't broken. The young lady said as how Mrs. Aldergrove used to walk in her sleep. Perhaps she jumped out."

"I never heard of her having walked in her sleep," said Cordelia thoughtfully. "But my cousin probably knows. It is very mysterious and dreadful. Did you find no trace of her whatever when you went back to search?"

"Only a bit of crape-stuff, Miss, such as her veil was

made out of. It was lying in the road several miles back. There was trails there too," he added significantly.

"And you think she was carried off by Indians?" asked Cordelia quickly. "Oh, this is horrible!" She covered her face with both hands, and remained standing thus for some time. Taylor turned his hat about in his fingers with embarrassment. It was a new experience to him to be the bearer of so sad and important a piece of intelligence to a young lady, and he was alive to the situation.

"Don't take on, Miss," he said presently. "Perhaps she ain't dead after all. She may be a wanderin' around with no scalp, but she mayn't be dead."

Cordelia did not answer. She was too overcome to speak. She removed her hands from her face in a few moments, and looked sadly at Taylor.

"I thank you for coming to me, and for having delivered the letter," she said. "This is terrible news to me; for, although I did not know my cousin intimately, the thing in itself is so shocking, that, had a perfect stranger been involved, I should feel equally distressed."

"I'm glad you don't mind much," said Taylor; "and if I can do any thing for you, Miss, I hope you'll let me know. Everybody in Santa Fe can tell you I'm a man of my word. You can trust Bill Taylor, Miss," he added proudly.

"I am sure of it," said Cordelia abstractedly. She was thinking of Mrs. Aldergrove, and scarcely heard him. Taylor felt that his errand had been accomplished, and moved toward the door.

"I'll say good-evenin', Miss," he said politely. "I'm at the stage-office, if you want me."

"Thank you," said Cordelia. "Good-evening."

The man bowed with a rough courtesy that seemed out of place in him, and, opening the door, went into the hall. Cordelia heard the tread of his heavily shod feet upon the

gravel-path outside, as he walked toward the convent-gate.

She picked up the paper from the floor where it had fallen, and read it through once more. The mistake Professor Hoveden had made in the name puzzled her, but she attributed it to the haste and confusion in which the letter had evidently been written. She sat down, and thought the matter over calmly; for she was not one to become excited or unnerved at any disagreeable news. Besides, she had never cared much for Mrs. Aldergrove, who had taken no pains to make herself agreeable to any one; so the affair called forth merely the surprise and horror which any tender-hearted woman would feel at a similar event.

She left the room a little later with the letter in her hand, and, going to the Superior's room, knocked lightly.

The apartment occupied by this estimable lady was better furnished than any other in the convent. There was a *prie-dieu* of carved wood by the bedside; and the centre-table had a cover of red cloth, embroidered in pale yellow silk.

When Cordelia entered, the Superior, seated in a well-cushioned chair, was reading from a book of devotional exercises, which she laid aside on seeing her visitor. She always wore spectacles when she read, which lent an additional air of severity to her countenance.

"Ah, my child!" she said softly. "Have you come to keep me company for a while? I am an old woman now, Cordelia; but my heart is still young. I enjoy having youthful faces about me, if they are also good ones." She leaned back in her chair, as was her custom when conversing, and crossed her large feet upon a footstool of faded wool-work before her.

"I have something to tell you, mother," said Cordelia, standing beside her. "I hope I do not interrupt your reading."

"Prayers for a lost soul," said the Superior solemnly, tapping the book with a significant gesture. "You know to whom I refer."

"Yes, I suppose so," said the girl thoughtfully. "But I came to speak of something else, mother. This letter has just been given to me. Read it."

She held out the sheet; and the Superior grasped it eagerly, her joyless expression changing suddenly to one of expectancy. It was not every day that a letter was received at the convent, and this one was pervaded with a peculiar air of mystery and interest. She opened it hastily, her keen black eyes scanning the lines almost feverishly. Her face altered, however, as she read; and finally she stopped, and threw the letter on the table.

"I thought it referred to the money," she said, unable to conceal her disappointment.

"Have you read it through?" asked Cordelia. "Do you know what has happened?"

"An accident, I see," said the Superior, "to Mrs. Aldergrove. Why, may I ask, are you addressed as Miss Aldergrove?"

"A mistake of Professor Hoveden's, I suppose. He wrote, probably, in a hurry, and substituted one name for the other."

"H'm!" said the Superior briefly, looking sharply at Cordelia as she spoke. She took the paper again into her hands, and glanced over its contents. "A sad accident indeed," she said, recovering herself, and nodding gravely. "Were you fond of your cousin?"

"No," said Cordelia. "I had no affection for her. She was one of those stiff, impenetrable persons, whose very voice causes one to shiver. I never liked her; but her fate seems, nevertheless, a cruel one."

"Yes, so it is — so it is," said the Superior, nodding again in an abstracted way. "Was she a member of the Church?"

"No, — a zealous Protestant."

"I thought," said the Superior, stifling a yawn, "the letter might refer to your fortune; but of course it is too soon for any news of that kind. How long it takes, does it not? I hope, my child, that your mind and heart are still filled with the desire to be useful to Christ and his Holy Church, of which you used to speak to me before you came here."

"Yes, mother: my desires are the same now as they were in the beginning."

"Then, why worry about Mrs. Aldergrove or any one else? Does not God order all things for the best? He had, doubtless, some motive in bringing this accident to pass."

"Perhaps so," answered Cordelia. "But you mistake in supposing that I worry myself, mother. I was only surprised, and deeply shocked. Taylor, the stage-driver, has just been here, and told me how it all happened. Shall I give you the particulars?"

"No, never mind," said the Superior. "It does not interest me. Let us talk, instead, about the work we are to accomplish with the money."

"Very well," said Cordelia; although she was beginning to weary of a subject that was constantly under discussion. "Have you formed any fresh plans, mother?"

"Only this. I would not, if I were you, devote the entire sum to the founding of a new order. Why not give a part of it to the convent? You know we are very poor; and the Bishop, I am sure, will advise it. But of course, my child, this is merely a suggestion, to be acted upon, or not, as you may see fit." She sighed, and glanced at the girl with assumed indifference.

"Certainly, mother. It shall be my pleasure to help you if I can," said Cordelia readily.

"You know how much the money would be to us," the

Superior went on, speaking with more animation than usual. "Our position here is not what it ought to be. The sisters are all very poor. I myself" —

"Yes, mother, I know," interrupted Cordelia quickly. "I thank you for reminding me, and I will gladly make you more comfortable. It will not take all my money to found the order. The rest is yours. I give it to you cheerfully."

"Ah, my child!" exclaimed the Superior, rising to clasp the girl in a strong embrace. "I knew you were generous and noble! That unworthy priest — that apostate, for whose soul I have just uttered fervent prayers — sought to prevail upon your feelings to his own advantage. Real friendship he had none for you, Cordelia. But, now that he is gone, his influence has waned, thank God! I am your true friend, my child. You see that, do you not?"

"I think you have kindly feelings toward me, mother," said Cordelia, with a smile. "As for the money, I wish the Church to benefit by it; and you, as a representative of the Church, shall have a portion of it to give to the convent, which has been a good friend to me, and offered me protection and hospitality when others forsook me." She spoke with some emotion, and, after a pause, added, "But you must say nothing against Lamont, mother. He is still my friend."

"Yes," said the Superior, with another sigh. "I regret to see that your mind yet dwells upon this unworthy and wretched man. But he is far away now, Cordelia: you will see him no more."

Cordelia bent her head sadly in assent.

"You are right," she said presently: "I shall see him no more." For a few moments she seemed lost in thought, and failed to notice the Superior's triumphant smile.

"And this cousin of yours, Margaret Aldergrove," resumed the Superior after a moment's thought, "who is

she, and what is she? Did you not tell me once that you were very much alike?"

"Yes: we resemble each other so closely, that strangers, and sometimes even intimate friends, cannot tell us apart."

"I think you told me some time ago that she had a small freckle on her neck, while you had none."

"Yes, mother: what a good memory you have!"

"Have I ever seen her, do you think?"

"Never to my knowledge. She seldom went out, and you are not often in the streets."

"I think I met her in the *plaza* a few days after you heard of the money awaiting you in France," said the Superior, reflecting. "She was dressed in black, and we came face to face. I spoke, thinking she was you, and was about stopping to shake hands, when she swept by without a word, or even a look of recognition. At the time I did not know what to think of the occurrence. I felt hurt that you should treat me rudely. Now I understand it all."

"Ah! you know I would not have acted in that way. You met my cousin surely. She does not take kindly to priests and nuns, and doubtless intended to slight you."

"Yes," said the Superior to herself, nodding kindly to Cordelia as the latter left the room. "I was beginning to think we had Margaret Aldergrove the Protestant here, instead of Cordelia Héricourt the Catholic; but now I see my mistake. And yet I was sure the woman who passed me in the *plaza* was Cordelia, and that she was even then getting ready to repent of her good intentions. It is a wonderful likeness. I wonder if our visitor's neck is free from the tell-tale mark?"

CHAPTER XX.

A MYSTERY.

“ If life be nothing more than a baiting-place, why should we be so interested in the affairs that concern it? Does a traveller repair the walls of an inn where he is to pass the night only ? ”

THE days and weeks passed, and news from Miss Héricourt was expected at the convent; but none came. Cordelia estimated the time required for her aunt to transact the necessary business arrangements, and write definitely about the money; and she found, in so doing, that the utmost limit had been exceeded. This inexplicable silence on the part of Miss Héricourt began to alarm her niece; and her fears were fully shared by the Superior, whose anxiety, indeed, was sometimes distressing to witness. By the advice of the latter, Cordelia finally wrote a long letter to the Bishop of Avignon to make inquiry. Some time elapsed before the answer was received; but it reached the convent at last, just as the girl was looking out upon the future with a heavy heart and a perplexed mind.

His Grace of Avignon had been greatly astonished at Miss Héricourt's communication, and begged to state that the older of the two heirs to the fortune had duly presented herself, that she had been satisfactorily identified by means of a photograph previously forwarded by Padre Lamont of Santa Fe, and that she had brought with her,

besides, conclusive documents. The money had been in her possession for several months, and she had satisfactorily explained the non-appearance of her niece. His Grace might, therefore, be pardoned for finding the young lady's letter somewhat extraordinary.

From the tone of these words, it was evident that the Bishop had little faith in Cordelia's pretensions, and was inclined to think she was some distant relative of the Héricourts, anxious to claim a portion of the wealth. Of course, he said nothing of the kind; but his meaning was plain enough.

When this letter was received at the convent, it occasioned an excitement such as had, doubtless, never before been seen within its grim walls. It would be difficult to describe the precise impression produced upon Cordelia by the Bishop's peculiar language. That her aunt had succeeded in obtaining the money was evident; but whither had she gone with it? and why was not Cordelia's own share forthcoming? Could an accident have happened to her as well as to Mrs. Aldergrove? Miss Héricourt had never been able to take care of herself, and something must have occurred to prevent her writing. But what was to be done? The remarkable silence of Miss Héricourt was not a thing to be treated lightly, for it involved therein too much that was important. But Cordelia was alone, unprotected, and without either friends or money. Had her aunt been captured by brigands, and robbed of her newly acquired wealth? Had she, perchance, been killed in some railway accident? What terrible mystery underlay the Bishop's letter? More than ever did poor Cordelia regret the loss of Lamont, whose counsel now would have been invaluable. What madness, she wondered in her perplexity, had induced Miss Héricourt to set out on so venturesome a journey, one might say alone? And, besides the trouble and anxiety in regard to her aunt, Cor-

delia felt keenly the annihilation of all her hopes of usefulness. There was now no money to found the order she desired to institute—no money for the convent—no prospect of any thing being done by her to further the interests of her religion; and this was a terrible blow, both to her and the Superior. Had a bombshell suddenly exploded upon the convent-roof, it could hardly have created more consternation than did the letter from his Grace of Avignon. The Superior, overcome by a disappointment which succeeded effectually in obscuring her judgment and all her better faculties, sat in her own room, wringing her hands in despair and rage; while the sisters, feeling each a personal cause for chagrin, whispered together with gloomy countenances.

On the morning following the receipt of the letter, the Superior sent for Cordelia.

"I wish to speak to you, my child, about this dreadful news," she began, her voice betraying great emotion.

"There is really nothing to be said," replied Cordelia gravely. "What good will it do to talk about it? My aunt has the money, and has made no mention of it. When I am able to collect my thoughts, I must take active measures at once, in order to discover where she is. It will require some time to do this, but I shall leave nothing undone that may lead me to the desired end."

"That is, no doubt, easily said, but difficult to put into practice," answered the Superior. "How can you take active means to discover the whereabouts of Miss Héricourt? Such things require money and influential friends: you have neither." She spoke bitterly, as if Cordelia were responsible for the calamity that had occurred.

"You are right, mother," said Cordelia: "I have neither, but I may have both in time."

"You are ambitious and sanguine, and I regret to see it; for they are qualities particularly dangerous to a wo-

man, — a young woman especially. Ambition is seldom gratified, and it occasions the waste of much good material that might be employed to a better advantage. Enthusiasm leads us everywhere except to the right place, showing us things which have the semblance of reality, but which turn to shadows in our grasp. No, no, Cordelia, do not cultivate these traits."

"And yet," said the girl earnestly, "was any thing worth mentioning ever accomplished without ambition and enthusiasm? Both, surely, incite to vigorous action, and must sometimes, even though it occur by chance, strike the right spot. Every failure, too, has its own value. We learn one thing which in future is to be avoided."

"I do not care to discuss the matter," said the Superior. "I wish to talk about your aunt and the money. You think something—an accident perhaps—has happened to her. Now, I have a different idea altogether." She paused, and looked at Cordelia significantly.

"What do you mean, mother?" asked the girl, in some astonishment.

"Listen," said the Superior, leaning forward, and bringing her hand forcibly down upon the table. "Suppose your aunt, after leaving Santa Fe, regretted having promised to give her share of the fortune to the Church. Why may she not have gone off with the money, to enjoy herself in luxury and wickedness?"

Cordelia started, and her face changed color. "Take care, mother," she said, with an effort to be calm. "You speak without reflection. You cannot mean what you say. My aunt may be weak, and wanting in depth of character; but she is not a thief." Her manner was dignified; but, now that Cordelia's wealth was not even a matter for speculation, the Superior cared little what was said.

"You have heard my opinion," she replied coldly. "Miss Héricourt was never so devoted to our holy faith as she pretended to be. She was insincere, and lacking in endurance. Once removed from your influence, who knows what thoughts may have taken possession of her, particularly as she was exposed to the schemes of your Protestant cousins? The temptation was great, and doubtless beyond her strength. The loss is an immense one for the Church. Think of the work this money was to perform! Think also of the good that now can never be forthcoming, and of the precious opportunity that has gone!"

"Yes, it is very sad and unfortunate. I had hoped to do so much, and now I am powerless to do even a little. But my aunt is honest, mother. She would not defraud me of my rights. I know her well."

The Superior was silent for a moment.

"What will you do?" she asked presently. "How can you begin to discover the truth?"

"I can go away from here, and work until I have means at my disposal," Cordelia answered bravely. "I have a little money of my own, and I am not afraid to labor for more. If my aunt be alive, she must be found. At any rate, my fortune is somewhere; and, even if it take years to get it, it will eventually be mine."

"Yes," said the Superior with indifference; "but by that time, after having been so long removed from the immediate influence of the Church, your desires to help us will have grown cold, perhaps have ceased altogether. You will have formed new ties, fresh interests. The Church can never hope to benefit by any generosity of yours."

"That is not kindly spoken, mother," said Cordelia rather sadly. "It is hardly fair. Why should my present plans fade from my mind?"

"You are not always wise," said the Superior, with the

air of one who thought herself infallible. "Your weak points were very apparent when that terrible priest was here. He had a most unwholesome effect upon you. He was never steadfast in his belief, and you did wrong to encourage him."

"We have been over that ground already," replied Cordelia. "We do not agree, so why discuss it?"

Neither spoke for a few seconds. The Superior, who felt herself to be the more unfortunate of the two, could not help letting Cordelia see that this was the case. She lay back in her chair, with her slippered feet crossed as usual upon a footstool, her coarse white stockings and a pair of shapeless ankles fully revealed, and with the outlines of her portly figure clearly defined against the crimson background of the chair. On the front of her gown were wanting several buttons, which had been replaced by pins; and between the points of connection were glimpses of something white. At times her hard features wore an agreeable expression, but now they were set and immovable. Once or twice her eyes shone with animation as she spoke; but these instances were rare, and did not often succeed the dull, heavy expression that was habitual.

"What do you propose to do?" she asked presently for the second time.

"Indeed, I have hardly thought about it," Cordelia replied. "I cannot stay here, of course. It will be better for me to go to New York, I think, where I can have every facility for advancing my inquiries about my aunt. I have, as I told you, a little money; and I suppose I shall be able to secure a position of some kind. I shall always be capable of earning my own living."

"You will never find your aunt," said the Superior decidedly. "She has gone off with the fortune, and is living somewhere under an assumed name, I am sure. By the time you have made money enough to procure

an investigation, she will be altogether out of your reach."

"I shall do what I can, at all events," Cordelia said firmly.

"To think," cried the Superior, clasping her hands suddenly, "that our plans should be upset so completely by a thoughtless and weak-minded old woman! Oh, it cannot be, Cordelia! God will never permit it."

Cordelia's faith in a special Providence was not, perhaps, so marked as the Superior's.

"I do not believe my aunt has stolen my money," she said. "And, as to our plans, they will yet be fulfilled."

"Never, never!" cried the Superior passionately. "We shall never get it. Mankind is greedy. It prefers to pamper itself, and serve its own interests rather than God's. I think often that man is the only despicable thing God ever created."

"And I," exclaimed Cordelia forcibly, "sometimes think that God, as we understand him, is the only despicable thing man ever created. No, no, mother, I do not mean that," she added hastily, as the Superior, with a scream of horror, fell back upon her chair; "but your own words make me hardly conscious of what I am saying. Lamont, for instance, were he here" —

"Don't mention his name to me," almost shrieked the Superior. "He is an apostate and blasphemous. Never recall him to me again."

"Very well," said Cordelia gravely.

She rose in a few moments, and left the Superior to her own reflections. It was fortunate, perhaps, that the conversation ended here; for, as in a great many other things, nothing was to be gained by discussion: and Cordelia felt that the moment for decisive action had come. She could not, however, avoid being a little apprehensive about Margaret. Where was she, and why had she not written?

Could she be travelling alone on the Continent? or had she accompanied Miss Héricourt?

For some time she was at a loss how to act, but finally made hasty preparations to leave Santa Fe. Once in New York, she would find some means of communicating with her cousin, and learning the whereabouts of her aunt. The Superior made no objection to the girl's proposed departure. She felt that in some way she had been imposed upon, and defrauded of her rights. To have a large sum of money slip through one's fingers in so absurd a manner was, in her eyes, the most terrible misfortune that could happen. She had borne much for Cordelia's sake. Had she not shown undeserved lenity toward Lamont? Had she not treated the girl's own failures and shortcomings with kindness? She had done this with the hope of a just reward, and now there was no reward. Her energies had been wasted, and her best feelings sacrificed, for naught. She heartily wished she had never seen Cordelia. What if she were not Cordelia, after all? And, in her disappointment and doubt, she actually forgot to pray for the salvation of Lamont's soul.

CHAPTER XXI.

CORDELIA MAKES A DISCOVERY.

"Bacio di bocca spesso cuor non tocca." — ITALIAN PROVERB.

WHEN it became known to all in the convent that Miss Héricourt had disappeared with Cordelia's money, a sudden change took place in the manners of the inmates. The sisters said little in words ; but their looks were eloquent, and plainly revealed the state of their minds. As for the Superior, she treated Cordelia as if she had committed "the unpardonable sin,"—as if, in fact, the loss of the money had been her own fault. Naturally, this strange behavior puzzled the girl not a little. She had great faith in the Superior, notwithstanding the differences of opinion existing between them, and was sure her confidence in this good woman had not been misplaced. But she was at a loss to discover in what way she had offended those about her. She busied herself, however, with preparations for her departure, and tried not to think of this fresh misfortune.

Two days before she left Santa Fe, the Bishop called at the convent, and conversed for some time with the Superior about the double loss the Church had just sustained, in being deprived at once of Lamont and a large sum of money.

"It was a horrible revelation to me," said the Bishop con-

fidentially, "when Padre Lamont made known his intentions. I have not yet recovered from the effects."

"Nor I," said the Superior gloomily. "Your Grace doubtless heard of the terrible scene we had here with him, — how he absolutely forced his way into Cordelia's presence in spite of all I could do or say."

"Yes, yes, so I understand. And she? Have you not had some trouble with her also?"

"Trouble!" exclaimed the Superior, raising her eyes, and clasping both hands. "I hope I do no wrong in saying so, but her departure will be a great relief to us all. She is constantly thinking and talking of this despicable priest, and you can well imagine how disagreeable it is to us. I could never understand Cordelia. She has one of those characters which are chiefly remarkable for their independence; and what is more dangerous, more execrable, than womanly independence?"

"True, true," said the Bishop with ready assent. "But about Padre Lamont. He has been gone for some time, I hear."

"Yes, your Grace. He wrote a farewell letter to Cordelia."

"And did you allow her to receive it?" cried the Bishop angrily. "Did you permit her to write to him? If so" —

"What could I do?" interrupted the Superior in an injured tone. "Had I ventured to impose my authority upon her, she might have taken offence; and in that case the results would have been disastrous. I said every thing short of absolute command. And the worst of it is," she added with a sigh, "that it has ended in nothing. There is no money after all, — not a penny."

"No, not a penny," repeated the Bishop thoughtfully. "It is most extraordinary. I never heard of such a thing in my life. The idea of Miss Héricourt getting the fortune, and going off with the whole of it in this manner!

I always thought her face was one in which weakness and deceit were equally blended."

"Yes, I have remarked it. It seems too hard — too unfortunate," said the Superior bitterly. "What advantages we have missed. And those poor girls! Such an opportunity will never occur again."

"We needed the money badly enough," sighed the Bishop. "What a great power it is! — the golden key which unlocks the doors of a thousand delightful realms, — even those of paradise itself." He smiled sardonically, and looked at his companion interrogatively.

The Superior nodded, although his figurative language seemed to impress her but slightly. "It is the greatest trial of my life," she said in a few moments, — "the loss of the money, I mean. I had hoped to take an active share in the work to be done. But God, I trust, will give me strength to bear the disappointment."

The Bishop was sitting in a comfortable arm-chair, with his hands resting on his knees. His face was very grave; and, as the Superior ceased to speak, he drew a long, deep breath.

"It is God's will, doubtless, that we should be visited simultaneously by two heavy trials," he said. "The deprivation of the money is, indeed, hard to bear; but what is it in comparison with the loss of Lamont's soul? I loved him as if he were my own son."

"I, too, liked him," said the Superior stiffly.

"It seemed so useless," the Bishop went on, raising his tone. "He has sacrificed all, and can gain nothing. Already he has been visited with contempt, and treated with violence; and what happiness can love bring him at the cost of salvation?"

"Love!" cried the Superior eagerly. "Does Lamont love? Was it for this — for this he disgraced himself?" She felt her hands tremble as she asked the question,

and her breast heaved violently. The single word "love" had been a revelation to her.

"Did you not know it?" inquired the Bishop. "He told me himself that he loved. I did not ask him the name of the woman, for I was too horrified to frame the words. But I suspect it to be Cordelia Héricourt."

"Cordelia! And she?" asked the Superior in a suppressed voice.

"Ah! I know nothing about that," said the Bishop, lifting his hand upon which the ruby sparkled. "I asked him no questions. But this unholy passion," he continued vehemently, "whether it be returned, or not, can be nothing but a curse to him hereafter, as it has been already."

"I understand now," said the Superior faintly. "The girl's conduct is explained to me. She bade me believe the relations existing between her and this man were of a purely friendly character. Oh! how could I have been so blind? How could I have been so blind?"

"With your knowledge of the world," said the Bishop, with slight sarcasm, "I should have thought the impossibility of mere friendship between man and woman of certain ages would have occurred to you long ago, and likewise have been plainly demonstrated."

"True, it should have been," she answered, not heeding his tone. She was too much overcome to say more; and for several moments she was silent, as if endeavoring to collect her thoughts. "I shall be glad when she goes," she said finally. "She is ungrateful, and has repaid my love with deceit."

"Be more careful yourself in future," said the Bishop sternly. "But," he added after a pause, "I wish this money could be found."

"It will never be found, — never," wailed the Superior. The Bishop left the convent a little later; and then the Superior sought Cordelia, entering the girl's presence so

wildly, and with so unusual an expression, that it could hardly pass unnoticed.

"Why, mother, what is the matter?" she asked. "Why do you look at me in that way? Have I offended you?"

"You have deceived me!" cried the Superior, giving full vent to her anger. "You never told me Lamont was your lover! You are false, — false and ungrateful!"

Cordelia's face flushed at this unexpected attack; but she drew herself up, and looked the Superior full in the eyes. "He is not my lover," she said steadily. "And you have no right to say such things to me."

"I had it from the Bishop's own lips!" exclaimed the Superior, bending forward until her face almost touched the girl's. "Lamont confessed it to him. Dare you deny it now?"

"I shall not deny it," said Cordelia proudly. "I shall be silent. Think of me what you please: it makes no difference to me." It was difficult for her to command her voice.

"I have nourished a viper in my bosom," cried the Superior brokenly.

Cordelia turned away, and, going to her own room, entered it, and locked the door.

A disagreeable truth, vaguely suspected during the past few days, dawned full upon her. She could not help noting the change which had taken place in those about her. The sisters, who hitherto had treated her with kindness and consideration, now hardly spoke to her; and their looks betokened any thing but a friendly spirit. The Superior seemed all at once transformed. She was like a dog, who, carrying in his mouth a piece of meat, had seen it snatched and eaten by another dog. To bite the man who had given the meat would surely be useless and unjust, for it was not his fault that the other dog had stolen it. But this was what the Superior, metaphorically speak-

ing, intended to do. She wanted Cordelia to suffer for the disappointment she herself felt, and Cordelia began to perceive the unpleasant fact.

She sat and thought about it with something like horror. Could it be possible that so much baseness existed in the world? Was self-interest paramount everywhere, even within the sacred walls of a convent? Was she throughout life to see nothing but the degrading spectacle of so many human beings, each struggling fiercely to be foremost, and to possess the best of every thing? Was this typical of human nature, — this selfishness which has at heart only its own well-being? If so, what a key to the whole vast puzzle of humanity had been the light cast by recent actions and events! For the first time Cordelia saw plainly that it was her money the Church wanted, and not herself. The Superior's friendship had been exercised with a motive. Hospitality had been offered and given with the expectation of a reward; and kind words had been uttered, not, indeed, from sentiment, but as a matter of policy. She recalled, with a shudder of disgust, the Superior's constant inquiries about the money, and wondered why she had not sooner understood the intentions of those who surrounded her.

To remain another day beneath the convent-roof, she felt, would now be torture; for the Superior's vulgar exhibition of temper, during which her nature in all its grossness had been fully revealed, had shocked Cordelia profoundly. It had been a lesson, the entire significance of which was very apparent. And there was no one to whom the poor girl could turn for either advice or consolation. She thought of Lamont with bitter tears of regret. The friend who might have been of such service to her she had lost, never, perhaps, to find again. She thought, too, of her aunt and Margaret; going carefully over every detail of the past in regard to them, and dwelling upon it. And,

in so doing, a recollection suddenly occurred to her, springing from the obscure background of half-forgotten events into prominence and brightness. She remembered the first conversation held with Lamont in the convent, when she had learned, with the fact of her aunt's departure, the knowledge of his love. The scene came back to her with peculiar vividness. What had Lamont told her among other things? Something she had denied almost indignantly ever having said. Had not Margaret and Mrs. Aldergrove assured every one that Cordelia had asked them to take her aunt to France in case any accident should happen to Cordelia herself? She recalled this false statement now, with a thrill of nervous terror. Mrs. Aldergrove very likely was dead,—but Margaret? Would it be possible for her to assume Cordelia's identity, and thus obtain the money?

Cordelia was alone in her room, which was a moderately large one, and lighted by a solitary lamp, which threw its pale rays across the table where she sat, leaving the rest of the apartment almost in darkness. As she thought of her cousin's possible treachery, she rose from her chair involuntarily, and stood with one hand resting on its back, the other on the table.

"No, it could not be," she said half aloud. She was intensely agitated; and the sound of her own voice, coming, it seemed, from a distance, made her tremble.

She sat down again, and tried to recover herself. Her head was hot and feverish. The little clock, standing on a shelf near by, gave forth regular and distinct sounds; while its white face, gleaming in the obscurity, was like a human one with dark, expressionless features. Cordelia rose once more, and paced the floor rapidly, trying to shake off the nervous dread which threatened to overcome her. She pressed both hands to her forehead, and made every effort to think calmly. After all, the idea was one which

in a more collected moment would probably appear absurd. Margaret's words, until now, had taken so little hold upon her mind, that she had completely forgotten them. They had very likely been spoken in jest; and would Miss Héricourt, weak and unreliable as she was, countenance dishonesty? No: this surely was out of the question. Margaret, too, could not steal. Her character was a disagreeable one, but she was no thief. Cordelia recalled the Bishop's letter, and then almost laughed at her foolish suspicion. The money, he said, had been given to Miss Héricourt, who had satisfactorily explained the non-appearance of the other heir. This was enough in itself to remove every doubt from her mind. Why had she not remembered it sooner? Yet the thought of Miss Héricourt troubled her still. Her aunt must be found, and the money obtained, — but how? Both ends must be accomplished, and this meant great patience and many failures.

It was not an enviable position for a girl of Cordelia's age and temperament, but the difficulties that lay in her way did not cause her much alarm.

She sent for Bill Taylor early on the following morning, and found that his stage left Santa Fe within twenty-four hours. This was welcome news, for the convent had become hateful to her. An army-officer and his wife, who were about to go to the United States, offered to take charge of her; and she was glad to have in prospect this companionship, which, in a measure, kept her mind from brooding over her own misfortune. She keenly realized the fact, that of all things nothing so quickly engenders selfishness as to be in trouble and alone. To be sure, her trouble was not a very serious one. It was more disappointment than any thing else; and this, to a really noble nature, means only a temporary forgetfulness of others. She had not coveted the money for herself; for she had a little property of her own left to her by Major Héricourt,

and her personal wants were few. But it was of her religion Cordelia thought with sorrow, — of the order she had intended to institute, — of the ignorant girls she had hoped to educate. And then, there was the Superior, whose bitter chagrin could not be concealed. The poor woman, who once had blamed Cordelia for being ambitious and sanguine, had possessed both these qualities herself in a high degree; but this was nothing remarkable. A character without inconsistencies is as rare as the roc's egg.

When Cordelia finally bade adieu to the Superior and the sisters, a more formal ceremony had perhaps never been seen. No one could hide the secret satisfaction which swelled her breast, and the convent-doors closed upon the girl with a joyous sound that apparently re-echoed throughout the building. In the garden, the carnations and the Superior's roses nodded cheerfully in the breeze; while the slender stream of water, splashing lazily into the moss-covered marble basin, caught a hundred gleams of reflected light, and seemed to bury gems in the pool below.

Cordelia set bravely out, filled with the hope which springs from a noble enterprise readily undertaken. Now and then Lamont's pale, determined face, upon which shone the ardor of truth, rose slowly up before her, and regarded her with a questioning sadness, — a look incomprehensible in itself, and yet expressing more than she dared acknowledge.

That night the Superior sent for Sister Josefa.

"Whom do you think we have nurtured in our bosoms these months past?" she said to the nun.

"Cordelia Héricourt?"

"No! Margaret Aldergrove, her heretic cousin. I know it. I have the proof."

"Holy Virgin! is it possible?"

"She has gone to meet the apostate. Every thing now is as clear to me as day. There is a deep-laid scheme be-

tween them to get the money. I have been a fool, but one cannot always be ready to counteract the wiles of the Devil and his assistants. Go : that is all I wanted to say, but keep the knowledge to yourself. Yet stay one moment. She had a mark on her neck, which she removed with iodine. I examined it when she was asleep, and saw the iodine stain. A few days afterward I saw it again, and the mark was gone. Cordelia Héricourt had no mark on her neck.

“Did you see the mark previously,” ventured Sister Josefa.

“Did I see it? No : why should it be necessary for me to see it. I saw the place where it was, and I saw the stuff she put on her neck to take it away.”

“I thought she had a stiff neck when the iodine was used,” said the nun timidly.

“Oh ! you did? Well, you are a bigger fool even than I took you to be. You may be deceived by such a tale, but I trust I have more sense. There, you can go ; and don’t forget to ask Our Blessed Lady of Guadaloupe to give you brains enough to perceive the truth.”

CHAPTER XXII.

MRS. ALDERGROVE UNDER A NEW ASPECT.

"Eppur si muove."

FIVE years after the opening of this story, a lady and a little boy were talking earnestly together in the handsome drawing-room of a large old-fashioned country-house near New York. The lady was Mrs. Fielding, formerly Mrs. Aldergrove; the boy, her step-son.

Time had dealt gently with Mrs. Aldergrove, leaving on her features but slight trace of his passage. But her face was the same hard, determined one, and as unaccustomed to display emotion as it had always been. Her dark hair, now plentifully streaked with gray, was carefully parted in the middle, and brought smoothly over her forehead without a curve or a wave. Her pale-blue eyes were still sharp and piercing; but, like her daughter Margaret, she had contracted a habit of partly closing them when engaged in earnest conversation, as if for the purpose of shutting out any thing likely to interrupt the current of her thoughts. She carried her head erect; and in her movements were a certain grace and dignity, which impressed those about her with a sense of her mental and physical power. How much of her expression was natural, and how much acquired, would have been a difficult question to answer. She had never been an attractive woman; but the respect her manner instinctively commanded, perhaps took the place of admiration.

The boy who stood facing her was not more than twelve years of age. He had light curly hair, and large, expressive blue eyes, wherein lay a trace of sadness. On the present occasion, he was evidently in trouble; but, notwithstanding a certain amount of uneasiness displayed by him, there was a frankness and manliness in his bearing altogether at variance with the idea of deceit. Now and then his lips quivered, but his voice was firm and strong.

"And so, Richard," Mrs. Fielding was saying in her cold, monotonous tones, "you still persist in telling me you saw a man this morning trying to force his way into the house?"

"Yes, mother. I was awakened by the noise, and I got out of bed to look into the garden. The church-clock was striking four; but it was daylight, and I could plainly see a man trying to get in by the library window."

"And did he succeed?" asked Mrs. Fielding sarcastically.

"Yes. He was half-way in when I called to him. He turned, and, on seeing me, ran off."

"A likely story, indeed!" said Mrs. Fielding decidedly. "At the very hour you mention, I was sitting at my window, which, as you know, adjoins the library. Your words are not to be believed for an instant. Such a circumstance as the one you have related could not have occurred without my knowledge."

"Mother," said the boy, drawing a step nearer to her, "I saw the man as plainly as I now see you. He was a big fellow, and frightful looking. He wore a slouched hat, and was in his shirt-sleeves. In one hand he carried a pistol, and in the other a crowbar."

"Nonsense!" said Mrs. Fielding sharply. "How extraordinary it is, Richard, that you will persist in telling me such a lie, — such a wilful and worthless lie, — one from which you have nothing to gain, and one uttered

apparently from the mere desire to lie! Why will you continually persevere in falsehood, and distress me in this unwarrantable manner? Since your unfortunate father died, the habit seems to have grown upon you. How did you contract it in the beginning? From whom do you inherit it? Not from him, certainly; and, as for your mother" —

"Ah! do not speak of her!" interrupted the boy hastily. "You never knew her; and — and she never called me a liar."

"Then, she did not do her duty by you!" exclaimed Mrs. Fielding with emphasis. "For I have known you almost since the day she died, and you have always been a liar."

The child's face flushed painfully, but he made no answer.

"And yet," Mrs. Fielding continued calmly, "there is a strangeness, an unnaturalness, about the lies you tell, which I find it difficult to comprehend. In the ordinary events of life, you have never, to my knowledge, told me a falsehood, — never uttered an untrue word to save yourself from punishment or blame. Why, then, do you come to me with stories of fires, of soldiers, of robbers, and a hundred other ridiculous things which cannot possibly be true? In vain have I pleaded and reasoned with you; and now, though I know you are not speaking the truth, you persist in repeating this absurd story over and over again in spite of my proofs and entreaties."

Richard looked at his step-mother frankly and fearlessly. "I am not telling you a lie," he said. "I did see the man."

Mrs. Fielding was silent for a moment, as though reflecting upon the course to pursue. Suddenly she advanced a step, and laid her hand upon the boy's shoulder, looking down upon his childish form with cold scrutiny.

"Richard," she said in a low tone, "when your father

died, he left you in my care ; and I promised to bring you up in the paths of honor and virtue. You have not helped me to keep my promise, though I think I have done my duty to the full extent of my ability. Your sister thinks she is old enough to look after herself ; and I have, therefore, scarcely undertaken to impose my authority upon her : but you are yet a child, and, as such, subject to my control. Castaly is rebellious and headstrong by nature, much to my regret ; for my niece Cordelia hoped, in spite of the difference between their ages, to find in her a companion, — a hope which, it is needless to say, has not been realized. But you, Richard, I have found amenable to reason, except in this one particular. Unless you correct this great fault, you will be disgraced and shunned in this world ; and, in the next, the loss of your immortal soul will be your final punishment.” Mrs. Fielding paused, and her expression grew melancholy. “You are very young yet,” she added, “but quite old enough to understand me, and to distinguish truth from falsehood. Now, think well before you speak, and then look me in the face and tell me the truth.”

Tears stood in Richard’s eyes, and for an instant he hesitated. “I have never told you a lie in my life,” he said finally, raising his face toward that of his step-mother. “I did see the man. If I should say I did not see him, I should then lie. I will not do it.”

He spoke the words almost passionately, and an expression of determination appeared upon Mrs. Fielding’s stern features. “Then,” she said, “there is but one thing for me to do. It is very clear that you do not appreciate my feelings in regard to you. You have a wicked heart, and you are wilful and obstinate. Did I use no means to bring you to a proper sense of your unworthiness, I should fail in my duty to the living and to the dead. I have appealed to you to no purpose ; and now I am compelled to

use force, lest you go unchecked to destruction. I shall lock you in your room, and give you nothing to eat but bread and water until you confess the truth."

"I did see the man," Richard repeated, with no evidence of yielding. "If you lock me up, it will be for telling the truth."

"You could not have seen him," said Mrs. Fielding. "I have been in the garden, and have looked carefully at the soft earth beneath the window. There are no footprints there such as would have been made by a man who had stood in the place. Go yourself, and look. Stand on the soft ground, and see how deeply even your slight weight impresses it."

The boy left the room eagerly, anxious apparently to obtain the proof that his story was correct. During his absence, Mrs. Fielding walked up and down the floor, her forehead contracted into an ugly frown, her lips sternly compressed, her expression evincing a fixed determination to act with promptness and firmness.

"God has imposed a hard task upon me," she said to herself, clasping her hands, and raising her eyes reverently to the ceiling. "But it is not the first time He has done so. A hard task truly, but nothing in comparison with what I have already endured. With His aid, however, I will perform it, even if it kill both Richard and me. Far better for the boy to be in his grave than live wicked and dishonored. And, as for me, what have I to cling to in this world except Margaret, who is well able to do without me? Well, Richard," she continued, as he entered the room, "what have you to say? Did you find the footprints?"

"No, mother: they are not there. John must have raked them over."

"John has done nothing of the sort!" cried Mrs. Fielding angrily. "They are not there, simply because they never existed. For the last time, Richard, do not force me

to extreme measures. Oh that God would put it into your heart to confess the truth !”

“It is you who are wrong !” exclaimed the boy, his fair face red with anger. “It is you who sin, and not I. You would force me to lie, and I will not, —no, not if you put me into a cell, and starve me.”

“It is not advisable to add insult to your other faults, Richard,” said Mrs. Fielding, a tinge of color overspreading her features. “You are wicked enough without that. Come with me. In solitude, and with the assistance of a meagre diet, I trust you will be able to obtain a clearer view of your perverseness. Pray to God to change your heart.”

Richard followed her silently as she moved toward the door. There he stood for a moment irresolutely, as if a passing thought of rebellion had flashed through his mind. But then his face assumed a look of despair, a strange expression for one so young ; and with tearful eyes and heaving breast he unhesitatingly ascended the broad marble staircase that led to his room. Half-way up, a window of stained glass, through which the sunlight penetrated, cast here and there long streaks of brilliant color, which danced backward and forward fantastically as the trees outside on the lawn swayed in the breeze. Mrs. Fielding looked at Richard with an air of resolution into which no pity could enter. At the threshold of his door the child stopped once more, and raised his eyes appealingly ; but, seeing no sign of relenting upon his step-mother’s face, he entered the room without speaking.

Mrs. Fielding glanced hurriedly around, as if to make sure that no loophole of escape existed. Then she closed and locked the door from the outside, and, dropping the key into her pocket, walked with a stately air across the hall to her own bedroom. Here she seated herself in a comfortable chair at a bay-window that looked out upon the lawn.

The breeze blew the lace curtains far into the room, and filled it with the perfume of flowers. Below, the wide-spreading trees cast broad shadows upon the grass; while beyond, a miniature lake could be seen, with the blue sky reflected on its surface, which glistened in the morning light as though strewn with precious stones.

To Mrs. Fielding, however, the beauties of art and nature by which she was surrounded were little worthy of attention at any time; and now she was too deeply occupied with her thoughts to notice them. So she turned her back deliberately to the window, and with half-closed eyes gave herself up to reflection.

Certainly the situation had its unpleasant aspects; and, had her own personal comfort been consulted, she would have striven to avoid it. But she was fully convinced of having done her utmost to escape the alternative which had been forced upon her. She was, unfortunately, so constituted that she was unable to penetrate very deeply below the surface of any matter requiring investigation; and she was often governed by the obvious and superficial circumstances of such affairs. Moreover, she had developed overpowering prejudices, which, with her defective knowledge of things, prevented the exercise of any thing like deliberate judgment. She prided herself upon her common sense; but how many crimes are daily committed in the name of this quality! Unless joined to the faculty of imagination, common sense is to be avoided rather than admired; and in imagination Mrs. Fielding was strikingly deficient. She was unable to perceive the possibility of the existence of any other explanation of the circumstances just submitted to her than that which the facts occurring within her own knowledge suggested.

When introduced to the reader, Mrs. Fielding was spoken of as a narrow-minded person, completely under the influence of her daughter Margaret; and time had not

changed her otherwise than to give her a small amount of independence, which was not by any means improving. Her limited vision rarely extended beyond her own experience, or that of Margaret. What was not known or thought by either of them she did not ordinarily believe, and the mere suggestion of possible error on their part was enough to excite in her a spirit of active opposition.

It has been observed by physiologists, that intense egotism is often connected with some physical weakness or deformity. Thus, for instance, those who are born blind, or deaf, or wanting in the proper number of limbs, are always more or less selfish and exacting. There is no doubt, also, that this disagreeable attribute is often developed by celibacy. Mrs. Fielding was physically perfect, and she had not been a spinster when Mr. Fielding married her; but she had been a widow, and this had doubtless much to do with her peculiar characteristics. It is true, that no mention was ever made to Mr. Fielding of the deceased Aldergrove; but that is neither here nor there. The worthy man had lived but two years after his marriage; and Mrs. Fielding's second widowhood had, like the first, exerted a tendency toward the revolving of her thoughts about the pivot of her own personality.

Of justice in the abstract she had no conception; and law, in her estimation, was only a system which brought about certain wished-for results with the least possible trouble to society.

She had always cultivated religion; but with her the Kingdom of Heaven was to be "taken by violence," and her prayers resembled demands and instructions to the Deity rather than supplications. Nothing to her was so agreeable as to contemplate the image of an avenging God always on the watch for sinners whose acts were to be rewarded with eternal punishment. It was peculiar, however, that, into these reflections, her own nature and Mar-

garet's never entered. They stood apart from all mankind, subject to influences and inspirations which ordinary people cannot enjoy.

As she sat looking moodily at the carpet, every feature rigid with determination, her heart grew as hardened as was Pharaoh's at each new plague that afflicted Egypt. Again she resolved, that, come what might, she would not swerve from the course upon which she had entered. Margaret was away for the day ; but she had consulted her daughter about Richard some time ago, and had received advice and instructions from her. The boy was obstinate, and in time would be precisely like his sister Castaly, who was indeed a most trying person to live with.

After a while Mrs. Fielding unclasped her hands with a sigh, and summoned her maid.

"Where is Miss Fielding, Jane ?" she asked, as the servant made her appearance.

"Out, madam. In the grounds, I believe."

"Very well. Give me my hat and parasol, and I will walk about in the garden. It is too fine a day to remain indoors."

Jane obeyed ; and Mrs. Fielding, standing before the mirror of her dressing-table, looked long and earnestly at her sharp and angular features, with the air of a woman who fully believes she has some personal attractions. Then taking her gloves and parasol, she left the room, and walked across the hall to Richard's door. She bent forward, and listened attentively. All was silent within. The corners of Mrs. Fielding's mouth expanded in a smile of triumph ; and, gathering up the long train of her gown, she passed slowly down the broad staircase, and out of the house.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CASTALY.

“D’où vient qu’un boiteux ne nous irrite pas, et qu’un esprit boiteux nous irrite? C’est à cause qu’un boiteux reconnaît que nous allons droit, et qu’un esprit boiteux dit que c’est nous qui boitons. Sans cela nous en aurions plus de pitié que de colère.”
— PASCAL.

To the most impartial observer, Silverbridge would never be a pretty place. He might possibly be induced to admit, that, from one or two points, the views were fine; but his enthusiasm would hardly go beyond this acknowledgment. And, indeed, while contemplating the rows of irregular, ill-formed houses, separated by straggling, dusty roads, which composed the greater part of the village, one could not help feeling surprised at the odd fancy of the late Mr. Fielding, which had led him to select so unpicturesque a spot whereon to erect his handsome residence.

However, he had seemed to enjoy himself thoroughly during his lifetime, and particularly after his second marriage. Neither pains nor money had been spared to make the country-seat, where he lived all the year round, attractive; and now that he had passed away from this world, leaving the establishment in sole charge of his widow, it mattered little in regard to its situation or surroundings. Mrs. Fielding, like many others, preferred personal comfort to every thing else; and, as she rarely went outside the grounds of her house, the village and the neighbors were to her of no consequence. Indeed, so far as she

and her daughter Margaret were concerned, they did not exist. They never paid any visits, and were quite satisfied to lead a solitary life, the monotony of which was only broken by an occasional drive to church in a closed carriage. When there, a high-backed pew, curtained in the old-fashioned manner, effectually concealed them from the worshippers, who, recognizing their desire for retirement, scarcely noticed them.

Margaret, or Miss Héricourt as she was now called, went sometimes to the city on a shopping expedition ; but generally she remained at home, shut up in her own room, or else seeking a retired part of the garden, where she could read or think undisturbed. She had little in common with the other members of the family, Mrs. Fielding, of course, excepted. Castaly and she had been antagonistic from the beginning, and Richard disliked her on account of the deceit which his childish frankness seemed to detect on her face. But Margaret was happy in spite of these drawbacks. Did she not possess the perfect ease, the freedom from restraint, the luxury and the independence, which she had so craved in her earlier days ? And, moreover, she well knew how to extract the best from every circumstance and incident. She had both receptive capacity and executive ability, — two qualities not often found together ; and, consequently, life to her meant a great deal. Conscience, that dread and importunate spirit which constantly comes forward to pluck most of us by the sleeve, was unknown to Margaret ; for she was one of those enviable people who are able to reconcile every act with their own sense of what is right. Desire with her meant inspiration, and she could always regard her conduct with an amount of satisfaction and self-complacency that in itself was admirable.

When Mrs. Fielding left the house, after having confined Richard in his room, she walked slowly down the broad

path which led to the lake. A feeling of sublime content filled her soul ; for she had done her duty, notwithstanding the pain it had cost her. Unconsciously, and with no idea of absurdity or exaggeration, she compared herself mentally with some ancient hero. Did the contemplation, in fancy, of Atlas carrying the world on his shoulders, call up greater ideas of superiority than the thought of what she had just done? Surely not ; and, in thinking of it, she drew herself up with dignity, and walked with increased stateliness.

On the border of the lake was a tiny pavilion, covered from top to bottom with roses, which here and there forced themselves through the lattice-work, and filled the air with a delicious and penetrating fragrance. Within was a table of carved stone, piled high with books and writing materials ; and seated before it was a young girl. Her elbows rested on the table, her hands were clasped beneath her chin ; and she looked dreamily, and perhaps sadly, out upon the water before her, where the sun's golden spangles glittered in the light. She was a tall, slender girl of about fifteen, whose dark beauty was shown to advantage by a gown of simple white muslin, confined at the waist by a soft scarlet ribbon.

As Mrs. Fielding's commanding figure appeared suddenly in the doorway, and obstructed the view of the lake, the girl rose instantly, and, with polite dignity, bade her enter.

"What can you be about, Castaly?" asked the lady, accepting the invitation, and seating herself stiffly upon a stone chair. "What are you doing with all those papers?"

"I was writing."

"Indeed!" said Mrs. Fielding, nodding her head with affected approval. "Upon what are you engaged at present, if I may be so bold as to ask? A novel, or an epic

poem? Does it depict the woes of a modern Clarissa, the mad acts of a new Lothario, or the adventures of an American Ulysses? My confidence in your genius is unbounded."

Castaly gathered together some sheets of manuscript which lay upon the table. "It is nothing," she said, coloring a little.

"What a substantial nothing!" said Mrs. Fielding calmly. "You must have forty pages there, at least. What is your definition of 'nothing,' Castaly?"

"Cannot things be great in dimension, and yet nothing in—in other respects?" asked Castaly, with some embarrassment.

"Possibly," said Mrs. Fielding, with a tinge of sarcasm. "You are talking nonsense, as usual," she added. "But it was not for the purpose of discussing your literary occupations that I came here, Castaly. I have some very painful information for you. It has been my duty—my sad duty—to perform a most disagreeable and difficult task; but, with God's help, I have accomplished it."

She fell back upon her chair as she uttered the last words, and sighed deeply.

"I do not understand you," said Castaly, in some perplexity.

"It is about your unfortunate brother Richard," Mrs. Fielding continued, in a monotone. "I fear he is in great danger."

"Dick in danger! Why, what has happened?"

"I referred to his soul," said Mrs. Fielding, with half-closed eyes. "His body is safe enough, but of what avail is the salvation of the body if the soul be lost?"

"I do not understand," said Castaly again.

"You mean you do not choose to understand," said her step-mother coldly. "However, as I do not wish to argue with you, I will come directly to the point. Your unhappy

brother, Castaly, has contracted a dreadful habit, — the habit of lying. And did I not use every means to break him of it, I should consider that I myself committed a sin. I resolved a short time ago, that, should he tell me another wilful falsehood, I would resort to harsher treatment than I have done hitherto. The occasion presented itself this morning. Richard came to me with some ridiculous story about a robber, whom he says he saw trying to enter the house during the night. I have reason to know that this could not possibly have occurred, and I have done all in my power to induce him to admit that he does not speak the truth. But neither argument nor persuasion has had any effect upon him. After much hesitation, therefore, and great inward conflict, I have been obliged to punish him severely.”

Castaly's face flushed. “What have you done to him?” she asked, her voice trembling slightly.

“I have locked him up in his room, and limited his diet to bread and water.” Mrs. Fielding folded her hands complacently as she said this, and looked from beneath her drooping eyelids at Castaly.

“Locked him up! Limited his diet to bread and water! My brother!” said Castaly, in a low, suppressed tone.

“Yes; and there he shall stay until he confess the truth, or, rather, the untruth.”

“He shall not!” cried Castaly, with sudden passion.

“What did you say?” inquired her step-mother, drawing herself up, and opening her eyes.

“I say you shall not treat him so,” exclaimed the girl, trembling with excitement. “Listen, Mrs. Fielding, and I will prove to you that you have committed a wicked act. Yesterday afternoon,” she continued more quietly, “as I was walking home from the village, I met Dr. Greyson; and I took the opportunity then of asking him about the peculiar stories Dick is in the habit of telling, thinking he

might perhaps be able to explain them. He asked me many questions, and, when I had answered them, said there was no occasion to be worried about the boy, but on no account to punish him for not speaking the truth ; as children of his age often had dreams so vivid, that, on awakening, they mistook them for reality. This, in his opinion, is Dick's case. I meant to tell you about it this morning, but forgot it. Now, however, that you know it, you must let Dick out of his room at once."

"And, pray, what do I know?" inquired Mrs. Fielding, not a muscle of her face changing. "Do you suppose I put any faith in such nonsense as that? An old foggy, like Dr. Greyson, is capable of saying any thing. But I am not one to be impressed by his theories and conjectures. I tell you plainly, Castaly, Richard shall not stir from that room until he says the story of the robber is false."

"He shall," said Castaly firmly. "I will let him out myself."

"I have the key in my pocket," said Mrs. Fielding, waving one hand triumphantly.

"Let us say no more about it," said Castaly, with a sigh. "But I think you have treated my brother outrageously."

"Do not be impertinent, Castaly. Your manner to me is never pleasant, but sometimes you are past bearing with. So long as I am mistress of the house, and your brother subject to my control, I shall act as I think proper ; and no words of yours can make me falter in what I consider a matter of duty."

As she said this, Mrs. Fielding rose, and left the pavilion with an air denoting an injured and self-sacrificing spirit.

When she had disappeared from view, Castaly took up her pen, and tried to collect her thoughts ; but her mind dwelt involuntarily upon the conversation which had just taken place, and upon her little brother, whom she could

see in imagination sobbing his heart out in solitary confinement.

"It is inhuman — unjust," she said to herself; "and, when dinner is over, I shall let him out."

An hour later, when she returned to the house, she rang the bell, and sent for Mrs. Fielding's maid.

"Jane," she said, trying to speak unconcernedly, "a walking-jacket was sent to me yesterday from the city, but it does not fit me. Would you like to have it? It is in the closet of my dressing-room."

The maid's face flushed with pleasure. "O Miss Fielding!" she began. "I'm sure" —

"Never mind. But by the way, Jane, do you know where Master Richard is?"

"I heard Mrs. Fielding say, Miss, as how she'd locked him up, poor lamb, for telling a lie," said Jane, in a tone of sympathy for which the jacket was doubtless responsible.

"The reason I speak to you about it is because I am sure he is being punished unjustly," said Castaly quickly. "I intend to let him out this evening after dinner. You can help me, Jane, if you will."

"Indeed, I will do any thing for you, Miss," said Jane. "Poor little fellow! I'm sure he's done no wrong."

"Mrs. Fielding has the key of the room in the pocket of her morning-gown," said Castaly. "When she changes her dress for dinner, I want you to get the key, and put it here on my toilet-table. Perhaps you had better wait until we go to dinner. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Miss, I understand. But, if Mrs. Fielding finds me out, she'll send me off without a character."

"Leave that to me. I shall see that you do not suffer."

"Thank you, Miss," said Jane; and Castaly turned away, as though anxious to end the conversation.

When the servant had left the room, Castaly was some-

what ashamed of herself. Her dignity, she felt, had been lowered in Jane's eyes; and her self-respect was consequently wounded. But there was no other way of liberating Richard than the one she had just chosen. She did not venture near her brother's door on her way down-stairs, and she made no reference to him during dinner. In fact, her manner to her step-mother and Margaret, who had returned, was so calm and gracious, that Mrs. Fielding concluded she had decided not to resist authority, and congratulated herself that Richard would be dealt with in a proper manner.

Never had the dinner seemed so long to Castaly as it did this evening. Course followed course with exasperating slowness and regularity; while Mrs. Fielding's stiff, tiresome remarks, and Margaret's cold rejoinders, grew momentarily more unendurable. Finally, however, Mrs. Fielding rose, and addressed the old butler.

"James," she asked solemnly, "did you take some bread and water to Master Richard?"

"Ay, madam; but I could not open the door."

"Did you knock so that he could hear you?"

"Yes, and called loudly several times, madam. But he did not even answer me."

Mrs. Fielding smiled. "Very well," she said, and, leaning on Margaret's arm, passed on to the drawing-room.

Castaly followed them, her heart bursting with indignation. She stepped out upon the balcony, and looked at the sky, which was all ablaze with the summer sunset. There had never been any sympathy between her step-mother and herself; and now, thought Castaly, the moment had come when an open rupture was imminent. She recalled the time when her mother had held Richard, a tiny baby, in her arms. Had not her whole heart seemed centred upon this little child, whose innocent eyes looked so wonderingly into hers? Tears rolled down Castaly's

cheeks at the recollection ; and the sky suddenly became a confused mass of color, purple and scarlet and gold mingled incongruously together. She turned away in a few moments, and looked through the open window at Mrs. Fielding, who had seated herself on a stiff chair to read Baxter's "Call to the Unconverted ;" while Margaret, with a newspaper in her hands, reclined in an easy-chair by the table.

Castaly gazed steadily at them both, hesitated for a moment, and then went softly through the room to the outer hall unnoticed. She ran hastily to the butler's pantry, and, seizing a plate, filled it from some viands remaining from dinner which stood on a side-table. There was no light yet in the hall ; but she found her way up-stairs without difficulty, the plate tightly clasped in her hands. She groped among the articles on her toilet-table, and discovered the key, placed there by treacherous Jane : then, stealing gently out again into the passage, she approached her brother's door.

"Dick," she whispered softly.

There was no answer.

Castaly smiled compassionately, and, putting the key into the lock, threw the door wide open.

The room was in darkness ; for the sun had set, and the blinds were tightly closed.

"Dick," said Castaly again, "dear little brother, it is I, Castaly."

She spoke in a low tone, but loud enough to be heard by any one in the room. Still no answer was forthcoming, and no sign of any presence except her own was visible.

"Come, little rogue, where are you hiding?" she asked, advancing a step. "See, I have brought you some dinner ; and I am going to let you out of this room if you will."

Again silence reigned, and a certain nameless terror overcame Castaly. She ran hastily to the window, and

threw the blinds wide open. The gray evening twilight penetrated the room, and a sudden rush of perfume came up from the garden. Castaly, trembling with nervous dread, turned from the window, and glanced quickly about her. The room was empty.

A sensation of faintness crept over her; but she caught firmly hold of the bureau, beside which she stood, and sought to steady her voice as she called once more, "Dick, my little brother, where are you?"

The room grew darker and darker. Castaly closed her eyes, and her arms fell by her side. Then, rousing herself with a sudden effort, she rushed into the hall, and downstairs to the drawing-room.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MOTHER AND DAUGHTER.

“Violent measures are always dangerous, but, when necessary, may then be looked upon as wise. They have, however, the advantage of never being a matter of indifference, and, when well concerted, must be decisive.” — LORD CHESTERFIELD.

WHEN Mrs. Fielding discovered that she and Margaret were alone, her book dropped from her hands, and, rising, she approached the table with dignified languor.

“What is the matter with you?” she asked in a low tone. “You are not yourself this evening.”

“I feel tired: that is all,” answered Margaret.

Mrs. Fielding drew a chair toward the table, and seated herself with deliberation. “Certainly,” she said, “you have nothing to feel unhappy about. You — both of us, in fact — have been singularly fortunate. But we deserve our prosperity; for, in order to gain it, we have made many sacrifices. Can aught be had in this world without labor? Nothing surely. But persistent striving in any direction must eventually be crowned with success. At least, that is our experience, is it not?”

“Yes, we have, as you say, worked hard, sacrificed much, and gained in proportion.”

“And yet,” continued Mrs. Fielding, “you have something on your mind, I can see; while I am burdened by the thought of these children, Castaly and Richard. They impose upon me duties from which, at my age, I should be free. The boy, particularly, is wicked and ungrateful.

He has to-day given me a terrible example of his depravity, as I told you."

"You have acted properly in inflicting a severe punishment upon him," said Margaret. "For all our acts fitting results are forthcoming. It has been fortunately so ordained, otherwise we could never know or value experience."

"When I married Mr. Fielding," said her mother, "I think God exerted his special influence upon me. Do you remember, Margaret, when we crossed the plains together, what a disagreeable child, even then, Castaly seemed to be?"

"Hush!" said Margaret quickly. "You know I cannot bear to refer to that journey. Mother," she added, leaning forward, and speaking in a whisper, "I thought I saw Cordelia in New York to-day. Of course, it was a mistake. I had been thinking about her, and only fancied I saw her. But I have been unable to rid myself of the impression ever since."

"What has come over you of late, Margaret? You are growing weak and nervous. I never thought I should have to incite you to think or act. You are not the same kind of girl you were five years ago. Then apprehension was unknown to you. It was I who sometimes was fearful, but you" — Mrs. Fielding made a contemptuous gesture. "Cordelia is dead," she said. "Can the dead return to the world? Can spirits come back to haunt us? Let us have no more such foolish ideas as those you have just uttered."

"I know it is unworthy of me," said Margaret. "We have no reason to be afraid. Cordelia is dead, beyond a doubt. I am Cordelia, in fact. The money is ours, and we have nothing to do but enjoy it now as we have done heretofore."

"I have always thought how much better it was for us

to possess this fortune, than that it should have been put to the use originally intended by the Héricourts. It seemed almost a crime to enrich the Roman-Catholic Church at our expense, for we actually needed the money; while the priests and nuns, who expected to get it, were rolling in comparative wealth and luxury. That Padre Lamont, for instance, would have claimed the greater part of it. I remember the interest he took in Cordelia; and the interest of a priest such as he is seldom unselfish. He was arrogant besides, and egotistical. I can fancy him enjoying life with a large income and a well-stocked wine-cellar, preaching to his congregation on Sunday the Christian advantages of poverty. The world is small, Margaret; and humanity resolves itself into half a dozen qualities, good and bad, which are equally distributed. And then," she added after a pause, "would not the order Cordelia meant to found have been an absurd and useless waste of money? I have no patience with such nonsense."

"I cannot help thinking," said Margaret, speaking in a forced tone of gayety, "of the king who burst into a fit of laughter on looking at a large stag, and exclaimed to his attendants, 'See how fat he is, and yet he has never heard mass!' We are like this stag. We are not Catholics, but we have the money they hoped to get."

Mrs. Fielding made no answer, but she nodded thoughtfully.

"I wonder," Margaret continued, "what has become of Padre Lamont. He wanted the money for himself, no doubt."

"I have said that he was always underhanded and deceitful," said Mrs. Fielding. "He had old Miss Anastasia and Cordelia completely under his control; and, after he left Santa Fe, Heaven knows what plans he concocted! But Cordelia is dead, and I suppose he could find no

way of reaching us. God does well to remove those who are superfluous," she added stiffly.

"The best are surely those who accomplish the most," said Margaret languidly. She leaned back again in her chair, and played with the newspaper beside her. "By marrying Mr. Fielding, mother, you gained a great deal," she said, after a short silence.

"Yes," said Mrs. Fielding. "God has guided us both with His benevolent and skilful hand. From the beginning He has watched over us, and shown us His special favor." She spoke in her usual cold, severe tone. Margaret glanced at her with interest.

"You have learned a great deal during the last few years," she said. "Or, rather, you have profited by much that I have taught you."

Mrs. Fielding smiled, for Margaret's praise was always delightful to her. She smiled, and let her half-closed eyes wander about the room with a look of satisfaction. All that she had — all that she enjoyed — was the result of her own labor and Margaret's; and for this reason she appreciated it. She roused herself presently to speak again to her daughter, but just then the drawing-room door was thrown suddenly open; and Castaly, with a white face, and trembling with excitement, burst into the room.

"Dear me!" said Margaret, much annoyed, "is that a proper way to come in, Castaly?" Her back was toward the door, so that the girl's expression was not seen by her.

"What has happened?" asked Mrs. Fielding. "Your behavior is both unbecoming and undignified."

"Dick" — gasped Castaly, not heeding the words of either. "Where is he? What have you done with him?" Her voice was so unsteady that her questions were hardly intelligible.

"Richard is in his room," said Mrs. Fielding frigidly. "Did we not discuss him and his punishment this morn-

ing? There is no occasion for this ridiculous excitement, Castaly. Your brother is a bad boy, and his evil-doing has met with reward."

"He is not in his room," said Castaly, in a scarcely audible tone. "I cannot find him. I unlocked the door, but he is not there. Where is he, Mrs. Fielding? where is my brother?"

"Not in his room? What do you mean?" exclaimed Mrs. Fielding and Margaret in a breath.

"What have you done with Dick?" cried Castaly pitiously. "I got the key to let him out, but the room is empty."

"Empty!" said Mrs. Fielding, her face growing a shade paler. "Why, how can that be? You must be dreaming."

"If the child was put there this morning, he must be there still," said Margaret. "Can he walk, like a ghost, through a closed door? But how came you to get the key, Castaly? It was a dishonorable act if you took it from Mrs. Fielding's room: it was stealing."

"Tell me where my brother is," cried Castaly passionately. "Did you suppose I would submit to see him unjustly punished? I told Mrs. Fielding I would let him out, and so I meant to do; but he is not there. You have hidden him elsewhere. Take me to him, I beg of you."

Mrs. Fielding's stolid face expressed as much consternation as was possible. She was not accustomed to display emotion; but, at Castaly's words, something like alarm could be seen on her countenance. Margaret appeared indifferent, as if the whole thing were an idle story, unworthy of attention.

"I do not believe you," said Mrs. Fielding at last. "You are following in your brother's footsteps. How terrible a misfortune to have two such forcible examples of depravity in a single family! To begin with, how dared you get the key? You are a thief!"

Castaly's white face flushed scarlet, and an angry reply rose to her lips ; but she checked it. "I was justified in taking the key," she said, "for I told you I would let Dick out. As to my not speaking the truth, come upstairs with me, and you, too, Miss Héricourt. Look in Dick's room, and see if you can find him. Come, come at once. He cannot be far away, but let us lose no time."

She left the room, Mrs. Fielding and Margaret following slowly.

"Where is the boy?" asked Margaret, in a whisper. "Did you put him elsewhere, that Castaly might not find him? Why do you not answer me?"

"I do not know where he is," said Mrs. Fielding finally, speaking with difficulty. "I locked him up in his own room. If he is not there now, he must have got out by the window. I dare say he is hiding somewhere in the grounds."

As she uttered the last words, they reached Richard's door. Castaly was already there, and had lighted the lamp. There was no closet in the room ; so the boy could hide nowhere except beneath the bed, or behind its voluminous hangings of soft pink gauze. He was not there, however. Poor Castaly, her eyes dimmed by tears, peered into the darkness outside, where nothing was visible except a spot of brilliant light which streamed from the window upon the grass. She was unable to distinguish whether or not footprints had been made upon the bed of earth below.

Mrs. Fielding and Margaret looked at each other significantly, knowing instinctively that Richard must have made his escape from the window, which was but one story from the ground. But, if so, whither had he gone?

"It is very evident, Castaly," said Mrs. Fielding, trying to assume a severe tone, "that your ungrateful brother,

not appreciating my earnest efforts in his behalf, has escaped from the seclusion to which I confined him. He could only have done so by climbing out of that window. Possibly he has made his way to the stable; for, much to my sorrow, I have lately noticed his habit of conversing familiarly with the grooms. At all events, he cannot be very far off. I shall have him looked for immediately; and, when he is found, he shall be punished again."

"There is but one way to deal with such headstrong children," said Margaret; "and I hope, dear aunt, you will carry out your intentions strictly to the letter. I shall ring for James, and tell him to look for this troublesome boy. His wayward tricks may cause us annoyance, but they cannot intimidate us." She rang the bell, and gave orders that search should be made in the grounds for Master Richard.

Castaly watched the two women with heaving breast, and eyes filled with tears. She felt how powerless she was to fight against them, and yet Richard must be protected at any price. She seemed all at once to spring from childhood to a stern, womanly dignity, as marked as theirs, but which gave way suddenly in a burst of passionate anger.

"You shall not punish him again!" she cried excitedly. "He is a child, and you are stronger than he; but I am not a child. You have always been bad, wicked women. I hated you when first I saw you; and, when my dream about you came true, I hated you the more. Many times I tried to tell papa about it, but he would not listen; and finally it passed from my mind. Now I can recall it all. I was only a little thing when we crossed the plains together; but I watched you, and I can see you yet," pointing to Margaret, "undo the strap of the curtain. I can see you bend over the lady who sat in the corner; and I hear the loud creaking of the swinging-back, as it falls down,

and the cry of Mrs. Aldergrove as she is thrown backward, and strikes the ground. I remember too" —

"Good God!" almost shrieked Margaret, "what are you saying?" She had darted forward, and grasped Castaly's arm. Her face had grown ashy pale, and her eyes were dilated with horror.

An exclamation of alarm burst simultaneously from Mrs. Fielding, and she would have spoken had not a gesture from her daughter prevented her. There was a momentary silence. Castaly, observing the strange effect of her words, which had been spoken more in a spirit of anger than any thing else, was quick to take advantage of it.

"I thought it was a dream which had come partly true," she said with flashing eyes. "But I believe now it all actually happened. The lady disappeared just as I dreamed she did; only you said she fell out, while I" —

"Hush!" cried Margaret hoarsely. "Are you mad? How dare you say such things to me? How dare you repeat your silly dreams, and insult me with your absurd suspicions?" Her voice trembled, and her face was still deathly white.

"The morning after it occurred," Castaly continued pitilessly, "I thought I had dreamed I looked through a tiny hole in the buffalo-robe that had been hung up to serve as a partition, and that I saw you, Miss Héricourt, unfasten the back against which the lady was leaning. I tried to tell papa, but he said he did not want to hear my dream. By and by I forgot all about it, but it comes back to me now. It seems as if it happened but yesterday." She still spoke with excitement; but Margaret, in the meanwhile, had partly recovered herself. Her expression now was one of cold contempt. She drew herself up as Castaly finished, and looked steadily at her without speaking.

"I see what it all means," said Mrs. Fielding, with comparative calmness. "You dream like your brother, only your dreams are rather more dangerous than his. I begin to think old Greyson's theory contains some truth, for evidently you are the victim of a delusion. On this ground I can look with some lenity upon your preposterous conduct and insulting language, for it is easy to see you are not yourself."

"I labor under no delusion," said Castaly; "and I know that I saw you. Miss Héricourt leaned over and whispered to you, Mrs. Fielding, and you shook your head with apparent terror. Then, after a while, you covered your ears with both hands; and Miss Héricourt, who was gazing at the lady in the corner, suddenly" —

"Be silent!" cried Margaret, seizing Castaly's wrist in so strong a grasp that the girl winced with pain. "You shall not utter another word."

"Why are you so pale?" exclaimed Castaly. "Why do you tremble, Miss Héricourt? Of what are you afraid? I can see that you are in dread of something. If it was only a dream, what does it matter to you?"

"Stop!" said Mrs. Fielding, holding up a white, transparent hand to the light. "I hear footsteps. One of the servants is coming, so do not speak. Ah, James!" she added, as the old butler made his appearance, "it is you. Have you found Master Richard?"

"No, madam. We have searched the grounds thoroughly, and sent even to the village; but Master Richard is not in the neighborhood."

Castaly's face changed color, and involuntarily her eyes closed. She tried to speak, but Margaret's cold tones interrupted her.

"Let him take the consequences of his insubordination," she said. "If he has run away, it will not be for long. He will come back again, never fear."

"Certainly he will," said Mrs. Fielding austerely. "I am not in the least alarmed about him. That will do, James. You can close the doors whenever you are ready. Come," she added, addressing Margaret, when the old servant had silently withdrawn, "let us return to the drawing-room. We need repose after the dreadful scene to which this ungrateful girl has subjected us."

"Richard shall be found—he must be found," said Castaly. "I am not afraid of you ; but, by your faces, I can see that you fear something. O Dick, Dick ! my little brother, where are you ?" She ran from the room ; and the two women heard her voice in the distance, and her pitiful sobs, as she repeated, "Come to me, Dick. Come to Castaly."

They remained standing in Richard's room, and for a few seconds neither spoke. The lamplight flickered, and threatened to go out. Mrs. Fielding clung to Margaret with a look of questioning terror. "What shall we do ?" she whispered. "She suspects, — she knows."

"She cannot harm us," said Margaret, trying to speak boldly. "If we can prove that she dreams, — that both she and Richard are subject to these strange fancies, — we are quite safe. She is half in doubt herself. Did you not see that she spoke from excitement and anger ? For a moment I forgot myself, it was so sudden ; but I am prepared now for the worst she can do or say. Come, let us go. This room is uncomfortable."

She shuddered, although the warm summer air came pouring in through the window. The lamplight trembled again, and the slow wafting of the gauze curtains about the bed cast weird shadows on the wall.

Mrs. Fielding glanced nervously over her shoulder at the waving reflections, and clasped Margaret's arm still tighter.

"Yes," she whispered, "it is uncomfortable ; for there

are phantoms here. But they can do us no harm, Margaret." She laughed harshly. "The affair has its ridiculous side," she added. "Can you not see it?"

Margaret made no answer. She drew Mrs. Fielding presently from the room; and, like grim spectres themselves, they crept slowly down the marble staircase.

A moment later the flickering lamplight expired, and a gust of wind swept the rose-colored curtains high in the air. Then all was still and silent.

CHAPTER XXV.

PROFESSOR HOVEDEN IS TROUBLED AGAIN.

"I am unwilling to doubt thy veracity, yet inconsistencies cannot both be true."

"Inconsistencies," answered Imlac, "cannot both be right; but, imputed to man, they may both be true." — RASSELAS.

IN every large city, even in New York as it existed twenty years ago, it is only the student of mankind, bent on searching the human brain and heart, or else the man of leisure who may likewise be an observer, who stops now and then to cast a glance at the scenes passing around him. How many thousands live and die without having noted the incongruous mixture of tragedy and comedy which is enacting at a stone's-throw, — without, indeed, being aware of its existence! And yet, into every life, be it great or small, some portion of both must enter, meeting the individual with a light and delicate touch, or else penetrating him so deeply, that his personality seems lost. Then, indeed, except through the medium of ceaseless action, he is powerless to escape; and to the unbroken regularity of movement in cities we may perhaps attribute, not a desire to cultivate thought, but rather one to avoid it. Business, that great incentive to constant activity, is the mainspring by which humanity moves; and it must be kept in repair at the risk of losing every thing else. Art, literature, and science are visible also; but they represent merely the jewels in the clock-work which are put there for ornament only. Take them away, and the machinery

will move as before ; but since they are beautiful let them remain, and once in a while we will look at them.

And now come with me, on this gray December afternoon, and watch the hurrying crowd of human beings which throngs the down-town thoroughfares of New-York City, and you will be unable to repress a feeling of sadness. See, appearing one after the other in quick succession, how great a number of faces, strong in feature, noble in proportion and outline, evincing intellectual possibilities of a high order, and yet marked mostly by lines which no purely intellectual effort has called forth. What thin, stooping, angular figures accompany many of these faces ! They are typical in themselves, and purely American. Perchance these men have spent night after night in poring over some dusty volumes, eagerly seeking knowledge at the expense of health and strength. No : they are not students. They have no time to read : scientific discoveries interest them but little, because they are little understood. Art is an enigma, for the solving of which life is not long enough. Their energies, therefore, expended in one direction only, leave vast fields dry and uncultivated. Sometimes the thought of this forgotten ground intrudes itself, and stands up to claim attention, like a beggar in rags who asks for alms ; but, alas ! there is often no vitality left with which to satisfy this demand, or else the ground itself is found to be so overgrown with weeds that nothing can be done with it.

There may be some wisdom in all this which we are not quick enough to perceive. Success in life depends upon the particular, not the universal ; and he who would become aught must early learn this truth, lest he become the victim of circumstances or mistakes, which time, instead of rectifying, only marks with broader and deeper lines.

Glance at those figures moving up town in a steady stream, with a well-defined ebb and flow. How they jostle

one another in their haste ! There is a murmur of quick, nervous tones, low and not unmelodious, accompanied by the roar and bustle of carts and vehicles that occupy the space between the sidewalks. Sparsely mingled with the masculine throng are a few women, some going down town, laden with parcels, in the direction of the ferries ; and others walking up the street, and seemingly forming a part of the manly business element. These womanly features, too, are worn with the fatigue of a day's work ; and sometimes one, weary with disappointment rather than labor, makes its appearance, and regards the others enviously.

On this gray December afternoon, when the lights began to throw their first pale-yellow rays from the shop-windows to the street, the tall figure of a girl walked slowly up Broadway from the lower part of the city. The peculiar grace and dignity of her bearing would doubtless have attracted attention anywhere except in this multitude of hurrying forms, where the thoughts of each person seemed riveted upon himself to the exclusion of all else. She was well dressed, without displaying any pretensions to fashion or elegance. Her plain black gown and tight-fitting jacket moulded a form that was almost perfect ; but, had she been in tatters, the air of unconscious superiority which emanated from her at every movement would have proclaimed her to be more than ordinary.

She noticed those about her as little as they did her. Evidently her mind was fixed upon serious thoughts ; for now and then a slight frown would appear upon her forehead, and a troubled look come into her eyes. Once only she stopped ; and her gaze rose from the gathering gloom of the street, through which now and then the glare of a lamp sent a brilliant light, to the cold, leaden sky above, whence a few snow-flakes began to fall. Then she resumed her slow walk, plunged again in deep reflection. Some of the snow-flakes fell upon her shoulders and bosom

and hair, touching each lightly, and soon melting with the warmth. She did not observe the figure of a man who passed by, looked at her with surprise from behind his gold-rimmed spectacles, and presently, turning, came close beside her.

He was a tall, well-built man of about forty-five, whose face was unusually kind and intelligent. There was a certain picturesque negligence about his dress, and in his long hair, which was striking because uncommon, and pleasing because it suited his personality.

"Pardon me," he said, addressing the girl, "but are you not Miss Aldergrove, or perhaps Miss Héricourt?"

"I am Cordelia Héricourt," said the girl, her grave expression giving way to a frank smile; "and you, I think, are Professor Hoveden. I recollect you, although I saw you but once in Santa Fe."

"I knew it was either you or your cousin," said the Professor with a puzzled look; "and yet in each case it seemed odd. When I last saw you, you were on your way to Europe to remain for some time; and I supposed Miss Aldergrove to be still in Santa Fe."

"You make a strange error, and yet a natural one," said Cordelia, as they walked together side by side. "You confound me with Miss Aldergrove. It was she with whom you crossed the plains, and not I. You sent me a letter, you remember, announcing the disappearance of Mrs. Aldergrove; and you addressed the envelope to her daughter, who in reality was with you all the time. The mistake seemed very mysterious to me."

"Eh! what?" exclaimed the Professor, his face changing in color and expression. "Miss Aldergrove—with us—you"—He checked himself abruptly, and sought to command his voice. "I beg your pardon, Miss Héricourt," he went on more calmly. "Of course, you are right, and I am wrong. I hope you will overlook my

stupidity. You and your cousin are so much alike, besides" —

He could say no more. Cordelia Héricourt, and yet not the one who had crossed the prairie with him! The ground appeared to give way beneath his feet, and the objects in the street danced before his eyes. He felt suffocating; although the sharp winter air blew upon his face, and the snow-flakes fell on him with an icy touch. Cordelia, unable to understand his singular excitement, looked at him in vague amazement.

"How odd," she said, "that you should have made such a mistake, Professor Hoveden! But what is the matter? You look ill."

"Nothing — nothing, of course," he replied hastily. "A recollection possibly. I can never refer to that journey without thinking of the terrible fate of Mrs. Aldergrove. Were you not horrified on hearing of it?"

"Yes: it was dreadful, indeed, but not a great sorrow to me. I hardly knew my cousin."

"No doubt — very likely," said the Professor incoherently. "But I must delay you no longer here in the cold, Miss Héricourt. If you will kindly give me your address, however, I shall be glad to call upon you this evening with my wife. She has often heard of you."

"How kind you are!" said Cordelia, taking a card from her pocket, and handing it to him. "To tell the truth, I have wanted to seek you out for some time; but various things have prevented."

"That was wrong, very wrong," said the Professor. "I knew your father well, and you should have acquainted me with your arrival here. But we will forget this negligence, Miss Héricourt, since I am fortunate enough to have met you."

Cordelia thanked him, as he bowed rather awkwardly, and turned away to resume his rapid walk in the opposite

direction. A certain feeling of relief overcame her. Here was a man who would interest himself in her, and give her what she so sorely needed,—the benefit of his experience. He had known her father, and treated her aunt and cousins, during their long journey together, with kindness and consideration. Besides this, her meeting with him was agreeable from another point. She had now been in New York for several months, vainly seeking employment. The little money she had was barely sufficient for her needs; and, for the first time, she began to realize what it is to be in a great city alone and friendless. On several occasions, as she had told the Professor, she had been inclined to communicate with him, but had been restrained from so doing, partly by pride, and partly by that repugnance to ask assistance which an independent nature such as hers always feels.

She went home with a lighter step and a more hopeful expression. The little room which she occupied, in an up-town side-street, was small and ill furnished; but as she entered it, and lighted the gas with her slender, neatly gloved hands, it seemed all at once to possess a unique charm of its own. A plain bedstead stood in one corner; and the chairs and dressing-bureau were neither handsome, nor especially adapted to use. But the curtains, of some heavy crimson material, gave a broad dash of vivid warmth to the colorless apartment; and here and there were strewn some bits of embroidery, wrought by Cordelia herself, and forming many-hued patches of light, like the reflections cast by the sun shining through a window of stained glass.

Unpretending as it all was, she could not help contrasting it with the chill gloom of Our Lady of Guadaloupe, where the brightness and glow from without never seemed to penetrate, and where every object looked frozen and shapeless.

Cordelia was not sorry to be alone, for with her solitary

life came absolute freedom. But of late gray shadows had begun to creep about her, their sombre outlines growing less and less distinct until they somehow merged themselves with herself. She remembered how confidently she had spoken to the Superior in regard to earning her own living; and she smiled mournfully now, looking at the small white hands, which, as yet, had done nothing. It was not easy, after all, to find work for them. The applicants for employment far exceeded the demands for services; and so, although she had striven much, Cordelia found herself precisely where she had been in the beginning.

And, all the while, not a line from Miss Héricourt or Margaret.

Cordelia had observed the Professor's strange manner when he spoke to her; but, knowing him but slightly, she thought little of it. Perhaps he was always perplexed and incoherent. He was scientific, an expounder of geology in a prominent college; and with this thought sprang up a host of minor conceptions.

As for the Professor himself, he went home hardly conscious of whether he were walking, or being borne along in the air by some unseen power. The people and vehicles in the street moved before him in a strange, confused mass; and he appeared to be the only distinct object among them.

"Miss Héricourt — Cordelia Héricourt" — he repeated over and over again mechanically. "Can it be possible?"

He reached his home, — he knew not how, — and, opening the drawing-room door, entered his wife's presence.

Mrs. Hoveden, a stout, kindly-faced woman, sat reading by the light which fell from a large lamp on the table. She wore a black silk gown; and her dark hair hung in ringlets on each side of her head, while, behind, it was gathered into a knot, and fastened by a silver comb. As her husband came into the room, she raised her eyes, and

greeted him with a smile ; but her expression changed as she noted his face, and saw him throw himself silently into a chair, with a deep sigh.

"What has happened?" she asked, letting the book slip from her hand to the floor. "The students again?"

"No, no — nothing of that kind," he answered, staring moodily at the fire, and shaking his head abstractedly.

"But something has occurred," persisted his wife anxiously. "Why do you look so strange?"

"I have seen Cordelia Héricourt," said the Professor slowly and distinctly.

"Cordelia Héricourt! Why, who is she? Ah, yes! I remember now. Were not the Héricourts the people with whom you crossed the plains about a year ago?"

"The same," said the Professor, nodding again.

"I see nothing extraordinary in your having met one of them," said his wife, a little indignantly.

"Ah! but I do," said the Professor, — "the most extraordinary thing that ever happened to me. Look here," he burst forth suddenly, sitting upright: "you see, there were two, — two cousins in Santa Fe, — four cousins, in fact; and they were as much alike as two — as four" —

"Dear me!" exclaimed Mrs. Hoveden, with a slight gesture of impatience. "Can you not be a little more explicit, my dear? What do you mean by two and four?"

"There was old Miss Héricourt, the Major's sister," the Professor began again, "and his daughter, Miss Cordelia Héricourt: then there were two cousins, Mrs. Aldergrove and Miss Margaret Aldergrove." He indicated, with solemn precision, each one on his fingers. "Now," he continued, "Miss Héricourt and Mrs. Aldergrove looked very much alike; while the two younger ladies equally resembled each other. For my part, I never knew which were Héricourts, and which Aldergroves. But here comes the strange part of the story. The two Héricourts and

Mrs. Aldergrove crossed the plains in the stage with me, leaving Miss Aldergrove in Santa Fe. During the journey Mrs. Aldergrove disappeared in the most remarkable manner. I told you the circumstances on my return."

"Yes : I recollect all about it. It was very horrible, and, at the same time, peculiar."

"I wrote a letter to Miss Aldergrove from Independence, informing her of what had occurred. I was requested to do so by the ladies, who declared they lacked the strength required for so hard a task. Now, listen to me, Maria. There is some dreadful mystery in all this, and I will tell you why. I met Cordelia Héricourt in the street not an hour ago. I was in doubt, at first, whether it were she or her cousin ; but she assured me her name was Héricourt, and expressed great surprise when I mentioned the journey across the plains in connection with her. 'It was Margaret who accompanied you,' she said, 'not I. And why did you write me a letter addressed to Miss Aldergrove?' What do you think of that, Maria? I can't describe to you what I felt, but it was something horrible."

"It is strange, certainly," said Mrs. Hoveden ; "but why should you feel horrible?"

"Ah ! it is a long story, and I always doubted them," answered the Professor vaguely. He was thinking of the handkerchief he had picked up on the road long ago. He had put it carefully away when he came home, and had almost forgotten it ; but he remembered it now with a shudder. A thousand indefinite suspicions flashed through his mind like lightning. He saw, in imagination, the small square of black-bordered cambric, with the owner's name written in one corner. He saw also the faces of the two women, the expressions of which he had interpreted as being of fear rather than of grief. Many other incidents, which at the time had been nothing in themselves, now

occurred to him with peculiar significance. He sank into a revery of pained recollection, from which his wife's voice suddenly roused him.

"I dare say it could be easily explained," she said. "I remember you told me the ladies wore veils all the while; and, being so much alike, it is possible that you mistook one for the other."

The Professor hesitated, wondering whether it would be advisable or not to take her into his confidence.

"Perhaps so," he said presently. "But you can imagine how this unexpected meeting startled me. They all seem to have changed places somehow. But, of course, the mistake must be mine."

"It has affected you strangely," said Mrs. Hoveden. "I can see that. It shows with what force impressions very often take hold of us. What sort of person is this Miss Héricourt?"

"Oh, I do not know! A good-looking girl, I suppose. She is quite alone here, Maria: she has apparently no friends, and I should like to show her some attention for her father's sake. When I thought I was travelling with her, she never raised her veil, and hardly spoke, — that is to say, Miss Aldergrove did so. But this one, the real Miss Héricourt, is quite different. She is probably, too, in need of advice or assistance of some kind. I told her we would call upon her this evening."

"To be sure," said Mrs. Hoveden readily. "Poor girl! It is sad to be alone in a large city like this. Are not her relatives coming back?"

"I do not know. I never inquired. But come: dinner is on the table, and I am glad of it. A glass of wine will do me good."

The Professor rose, and walked into the adjoining room; while Mrs. Hoveden, as she followed, looked at him in a manner half doubtful, half anxious. Twice during the

meal, when she spoke to him about some trifling matter, he did not hear her. His food was untasted, and he sat staring dreamily at the burning logs on the hearth. Once, as he gazed, he fancied he saw the face of the lost Mrs. Aldergrove, wreathed in flame, and contorted with an expression of mockery, in which a trace of sadness lingered. "I am Miss Héricourt," it seemed to say, "not Mrs. Aldergrove!" And as the firelight shot up in a purple blaze, twisting itself in a hundred fantastic curves, the words, "Miss Héricourt," appeared to be written therein, with vivid colors of red and yellow, and also to twine themselves like serpents around the weird face in the centre.

CHAPTER XXVI.

CORDELIA TELLS HER STORY.

“Conceal not your secret from your friend, or you deserve to lose him.”

It was almost nine o'clock when the Hovedens reached the house in which Cordelia lived. The walk thither in the bleak night air cooled the Professor's heated forehead, and reduced him to a calmer mood. Still, his mind was filled with but one thought, upon which he pondered persistently. He felt that he stood face to face with something indefinite and intangible, which his own perseverance might convert into reality: and he resolved, that, during his coming interview with Cordelia, he would note carefully her every word, gesture, and expression; for much therein might aid him. He was naturally a close observer; and, now that he had an object in view, he intended to be doubly so.

When she entered the small drawing-room, in which he and his wife were seated, he greeted her kindly; but accompanying his words was a keen look of inquiry, that apparently sought something, the existence of which had been hitherto doubted. The moment she spoke, however, a sudden change came over his features. The voices of those about him always impressed him forcibly; but, in the surprise of meeting Cordelia that afternoon, he had not noticed hers particularly. It was the fancied change

in a voice which had led to his first suspicion of the supposed Miss Héricourt, and again he looked narrowly at the girl. She was making some trifling remark to Mrs. Hoveden, whose kind, gracious manner had made her feel for the first time that something was lacking in her solitary life. The Professor listened attentively, and the blood rushed to his face.

“No,” he thought, “it is not she. This is not the girl who crossed the plains with me.” For an instant he almost feared he would shout aloud the words which seemed to ring in his brain in a thousand varied tones. He made, therefore, a hasty effort to command his voice and expression as he said quickly, —

“You are, indeed, startlingly like your cousin, Miss Héricourt. But I think I can detect one or two differences between you. Your voice is softer and more sympathetic than hers; and, although you are both dignified, your dignity is of another kind, partaking rather of gentleness than haughtiness. Pardon me for speaking so plainly, but I observe such little distinctions minutely.”

Cordelia smiled. “There are differences between us, I know,” she said. “But whether or not they are to my advantage is a matter of taste. People who are not close observers rarely detect them. But Margaret has one peculiarity from which I am free. There is a brown freckle on her neck, close to her hair. See, I have none.”

She bent forward, still smiling, toward Mrs. Hoveden.

“Ah, indeed!” exclaimed the Professor with animation. “So Miss Aldergrove has a freckle on her neck!” He recovered himself at an astonished glance from his wife.

“Why, how strange you are, Professor!” she said reprovingly. “What can it possibly matter to you whether she has, or not? You startled him this afternoon, Miss Héricourt, by your unexpected appearance. He mistook

you for your cousin, and could hardly believe it was not she."

"It was a natural mistake," said Cordelia; "but I must begin now to talk seriously to you, Professor Hoveden. I heard from Taylor, the stage-driver, about Mrs. Aldergrove's disappearance; but there are other things which I should like to learn. Were my aunt and cousins much alone during the journey? Did they mix to any extent with the other passengers?"

"They hardly spoke to us," said the Professor, "and that perhaps is one reason why I confounded the names. They expressed a desire to be entirely alone, so the portion of the stage occupied by them was partitioned off from the rest. Whenever we stopped, they went into their own tent, and remained there until it was time to start again."

Cordelia did not reply at once, but she appeared to be thinking intently. She raised her eyes presently, and looked at the Professor. "I ought to tell you something of myself," she said. "You are astonished, doubtless, to find me in New York alone. I do not wonder," she added, as he bowed assent, "for it is as great a surprise to me as to you."

"Your aunt's return has possibly been delayed by the formation abroad of other plans," suggested Mrs. Hoveden.

"I will tell you the whole story if you care to hear it," said Cordelia. "It is a strange one." She paused for a moment, and then added, "Your interest inspires me with more confidence than I have felt for a long time. You know, Professor, when my father died, he did not leave my aunt and me well off; but, by one of those peculiar circumstances which we call providential, a relative in France announced to us just then that we were the possessors of a large sum of money which for many years was supposed to be lost. This money was my father's and mine; but, he being dead, my aunt became his heir.

Neither of us ever cared for what are termed the pleasures of life, and we are devout Roman Catholics. It had long been my wish to found a religious order which would help to educate the ignorant New-Mexican girls, for it seemed to me so much might be done which hitherto had never been attempted for want of proper means. When I knew, therefore, the money was mine, and that my dream might be realized, you can imagine my delight. I took my aunt into my confidence, and she resolved to devote a portion of her share of the fortune to the contemplated work." Cordelia smiled a little mournfully at the recollection of her hopeful enthusiasm. "Of course," she continued, "it was necessary for us to go to France to get this money. Every pleasure has its disagreeable side. Pain, in fact, is inseparable from enjoyment, is it not? But no real pain has its agreeable side." She seemed to be speaking half to herself.

"Such words as those might be expected from a man of my age," said the Professor; "but in a girl like you" —

"Ah!" interrupted Cordelia, "every circumstance which has surrounded me since my father's death has been a lesson dearly learned. I am beginning to grow cynical, I fear. But let me go on with my story, lest I weary you. It was arranged that my aunt and I should go to France; but, just as the plan was conceived, I fell dangerously ill. For days my mind wandered; and, when finally it returned to me, I found myself an inmate of the convent of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Our confessor, Padre Lamont, told me my aunt had gone to France, accompanied by my cousins, who intended to make a tour of the Continent."

"Poor child!" said Mrs. Hoveden, bending forward, with ready sympathy, to clasp Cordelia's hand. "How could they leave you alone and ill among strangers? It is horrible to think of. Were you not disgusted and distressed at their conduct?"

"Hardly," Cordelia replied, with a faint smile. "I thought their behavior odd, of course; but, as I knew my cousins very slightly, their going abroad mattered little to me. My aunt's departure surprised more than it grieved me. She is not mentally strong. I do not mean that she lacks ordinary intelligence, but it has always been a necessity with her to depend upon some one else. Opinions she has none, and impulse is unknown to her. It astonished me greatly, therefore, to hear she had undertaken the journey partly alone, and for a purpose that required much judgment and self-reliance. She rarely, even to me, displayed either sentiment or affection. Her interest was of the kind which is egotistical on account of its dependence. She was constantly coming to me for advice, and never failed to accept my views. I am inclined to think, however, that the views of any other person would have satisfied her as well."

"Then, she was easily influenced and led?" said the Professor interrogatively.

"Yes. Any strong will could command her. I have heard her change her mind a dozen times in a day. She usually agreed with the person with whom she talked." Cordelia paused, as if her thoughts dwelt upon some past event.

"A peculiar character, certainly," the Professor said presently, "but one that doubtless is common enough. Pray go on, Miss Héricourt. Your story is extremely interesting." He spoke in a quick, nervous tone; and, had Cordelia observed his face intently, she would have seen upon it a look of eager expectancy.

"I recovered my strength gradually," she continued. "The Superior of the convent, and the sisters, were kind to me; and for a time I lived a quiet, peaceful life in Santa Fe, waiting patiently for news from France. One night Taylor, the driver, came to see me. He brought your

letter, and gave me the particulars of the accident which had occurred. The letter was addressed to Miss Aldergrove; and Taylor, it seemed, had inquired in vain for such a person in the city. Finally, some one remembered the Aldergroves were related to Major Héricourt, and that a member of his family was then at the convent. Taylor came there at once, and found me; but it was by a mere chance that he succeeded in so doing. I understood, however, Professor, that in a fit of absent-mindedness, or probable haste, you substituted one name for the other."

"Yes, yes: I wrote hurriedly. It was a stupid, unpardonable mistake," said the Professor, in some confusion.

"Time went on, but I heard nothing from my aunt or my cousin Margaret," Cordelia continued. "Finally, becoming uneasy, I wrote, by the Superior's advice, to the Bishop of Avignon, to whom letters and photographs had been sent for our identification, and inquired if Miss Héricourt had claimed the fortune. I received a reply, stating that the money had been given to her long ago, and that she had satisfactorily explained the absence of her niece."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed the Professor vehemently. "The money had been given to her, you say?" His face was quite pale, and his eyes had in them an expression of combined horror and amazement.

"Yes: is it not extraordinary? My aunt must have the money; but she has never written to me, nor has she sent me my share. It has been a terrible disappointment to me, not on my own account, but because it has destroyed all my expectations of doing good, and elevating myself and others in the way I had intended. Besides this, I am anxious on my aunt's account. As I have said, there was never any strong affection between us; but I know how little fitted she is, either to manage a fortune or to live alone."

"But what do you think can have happened?" the

Professor exclaimed, removing his glasses, and wiping them carefully with his handkerchief. "Where can Miss Héricourt be?" His voice again betrayed his excitement; for he was thinking of the little square of black-bordered cambric, with its owner's name written in one corner.

"It is, indeed, a wonderful story," said Mrs. Hoveden thoughtfully. "Did you ever hear either of the ladies mention this fortune?" she asked, turning to her husband.

"Never," he answered promptly. "I think I only spoke to Miss Héricourt on three or four occasions, and to the others only on the day when Mrs. Aldergrove disappeared. They had little need of my services, and preferred being alone."

"What is your opinion, Professor Hoveden?" Cordelia inquired earnestly. "I should be glad to know it, and to act upon your advice."

The Professor hesitated. What should he say?

As Cordelia progressed in her story, the whole horrible truth, hitherto but vaguely suspected, had burst upon him with the utmost force. The mention of the fortune had been like a flash of vivid light thrown suddenly into some obscure corner, and illuminating, not only it, but the surroundings also. It was all as clear in his own mind as if he had actually seen the deed which had been committed in the rear of the stage-coach, — as if he, like little Castaly Fielding, had peered through an opening in the buffalo-robe, and witnessed the terrible act wrought by Margaret's hands. The silence in regard to the money, the absence of any news from Miss Héricourt or Miss Aldergrove, the non-arrival of Cordelia's share of the wealth, were so many facts which burst suddenly forth, endowed with a double significance. It was as much as he could do to avoid starting up, and exclaiming, "Your aunt is lost, perhaps dead; and the Aldergroves have stolen your money!"

What would be the effect, he wondered, of words so rashly spoken? Yet, if he spoke at all, must he not say something of this kind? He felt Cordelia's unconstrained glance rest upon him, as she awaited his answer to her question; and he saw his wife's eyes filled with vague amazement.

"Certainly — of course — I agree with you perfectly, Miss Héricourt," he said, rather incoherently. "Your aunt has met with an accident, I think: in fact, I am almost sure of it. Such things are common enough; and, with your knowledge of Miss Héricourt's character, you know best what opinion is likely to be the correct one." The poor Professor was aware that this reply was inconsistent, and probably highly unsatisfactory; and yet, when he had spoken, he experienced a strange sense of relief. A sunbeam, it seemed, had pierced the dark cloud, and cast a golden reflection over a portion of it. He drew a long breath, for there was no longer any danger of his frightful suspicion being revealed.

"But," broke in Mrs. Hoveden, "if that is so, some means should be taken at once to discover the whereabouts of the poor lady if she be still living. It is dreadful to think of her being alone in some hospital, or other equally disagreeable place. You ought to make some effort to find her, Miss Héricourt."

"That is what I should like — what I intend — to do," said Cordelia. She remembered now, with all the force of a half-forgotten recollection which oftentimes springs forth to confront us defiantly, how powerless she was to act. She looked at Mrs. Hoveden, whose manner surely was kind and encouraging, and then at the Professor. His eyes were downcast; but she felt instinctively, that, were they lifted to hers, their expression would not be a forbidding one.

"I will be perfectly frank with you," she said presently;

"that is, as frank as it is necessary to be. I left Santa Fe for two reasons. The principal one was owing to my desire to make an investigation in regard to my aunt, which included, of course, my own personal interest. The other reason — well — that does not matter. It has nothing to do with the present or the future. It concerns the past only."

"Is there, then, a secret in your past?" asked the Professor quickly. "Forgive me," he added: "I have no right to put such a question. Do not answer it."

"There is no secret," said Cordelia, smiling a little. "But I have known what it is to suffer regret, and to bewail opportunities voluntarily thrown away."

She was thinking then of Lamont; and, unconsciously, a look of sadness came over her face, and obscured for an instant the light in her eyes.

"Who has not done so?" asked the Professor gravely. "It is owing to this, that we have some wise men in the world. I think," he added, suddenly changing his tone to one more easy, "you should lose no time in putting your plans into execution. Indeed, I fear you have delayed too long already. But I understand, that a girl like you, alone, and perhaps ignorant of such matters, would find it a difficult undertaking to learn any thing about Miss Héricourt. I have had some experience, however; and I hope you will allow me to help you."

Cordelia's face flushed. "You are too kind," she said gratefully. "I have long wanted to ask your advice, and to see also if you could put me in the way of getting some employment. You know," she added bravely, "that I have come here to work."

"To work! why, what can you do?" he asked, in a low tone. He felt affected in some respect by the girl's calm manner, which had impressed him from the beginning, and now penetrated to the very depths of his understanding.

In her clear, honest eyes were an amount of determination and an independence of spirit that fell upon his own overwrought imagination as a cool shower might upon a flower parched and withered by the sun's heat. "What can you do?" he repeated. "Can you teach?"

"Yes, I think so. I have been passably well educated. I should like, above all things, a position as governess; but, unfortunately, no one wants me. I have made every effort to obtain such a situation, but, so far, without success. Six months have passed since I came to New York, and I am still idle. I confess that I begin to feel discouraged."

"Oh! you must not do that," cried Mrs. Hoveden eagerly. "You have yet to learn, perhaps, that influence, not worth, gets us what we want, generally speaking. Perhaps we may be able to help you."

"I am sure of it," said the Professor confidently. "We shall try, at all events. I am greatly interested in your story, Miss Héricourt, and would deem it a privilege to do something for you."

"I thank you both for your goodness," said Cordelia. "I did not expect to find such generous friends in this great, cold city. But what place can there be for me among these busy thousands?"

"There is always room for one more, you know," said Mrs. Hoveden, smiling.

"You shall hear from us again in a day or two," she added a moment later, when they rose to leave.

"And do not be cast down in the mean while," put in the Professor. "It is very remarkable about Miss Héricourt and your cousin, but I have no doubt that we shall in time throw some light on the mystery. Success always rewards diligent action. Do not forget that."

"I cannot tell you how much I thank you both," said Cordelia. "Now that I know you, I no longer feel alone."

The Professor, with his wife leaning on his arm, left the

house in a few moments, and walked slowly along the brilliantly lighted street. He breathed a deep sigh of mingled relief and satisfaction. Thank Heaven ! he had let neither Cordelia nor Mrs. Hoveden suspect what was passing in his mind. Try as he would, however, he could not drive the subject from him. Wherever he turned, it seemed to rise up and confront him like a grim spectre. It lingered in the yellow lamplight, and even in the dark clouds above, spangled with stars. He endeavored to escape from it by making several hasty attempts at conversation with his wife, but it was of no use. In his very tone lay a subdued excitement which he could not suppress, and presently he relapsed into gloomy silence.

"What is the matter?" asked Mrs. Hoveden. "Are you thinking of Miss Héricourt's story, and your mistake of this afternoon?"

"Yes," he replied mechanically, "still thinking of it."

"I never knew you to be so upset by a trifle," she said. "You are not personally concerned in the lady's disappearance, and your error was natural enough. And yet, two or three times this evening you looked wild and frightened, just as if a ghost had suddenly appeared before you. You are growing old, Professor."

He made no answer, but walked along with his eyes fixed upon the ground.

"Ghosts are shadows," he said finally, half to himself. "What I saw was flesh and blood."

"What are you saying?" inquired his wife anxiously.

"Nothing, nothing. But if you care to do me a service, Maria, try to find some employment for that girl. Why, for instance, could she not teach Elfrida?"

"Elfrida! It is not a matter to decide hastily," said Mrs. Hoveden. "But I will think of it, and help her if I can."

They reached their own house as she spoke. The Pro-

fessor looked up at the sky, and at the few dim, almost imperceptible, stars.

“It must be done,” he said under his breath, “and I will help her. Come,” he added to his wife, “let us go in quickly. It is cold, and I am chilled through.”

They passed through the entrance, closing the heavy door with a bang that resounded through the deserted street, and sent back a faint echo.

CHAPTER XXVII.

ELFRIDA.

“Et ses yeux bleus, dont le ton
Est changeant, chez quels artistes,
Chez quels rois, les trouve-t-on,
Ces saphirs pleins d'améthystes ?” — JEAN RICHEPIN.

CORDELIA went to bed that night with a smile on her lips ; and, when she rose on the following morning, her heart felt lighter than it had done for many a day. What power sometimes the smallest incident has which comes unawares into our lives, changing our surroundings from mere dross to purest gold, and imbuing us with a sense of ease and hopefulness, unjustifiable perhaps, but real for all that ! It was so at this moment with Cordelia. Her conversation with the Hovedens, although nothing in itself, had roused her latent faculties into activity, and caused her discouragement to melt away like frost beneath the sun's rays. Her disposition was naturally a bright one, little given to view the wrong side of possibilities ; and now she was somewhat animated by the prospect of a future as joyous as it was unexpected. There was, of course, no reason whatever for this. Her new friends had made no promises of any kind ; and yet, as she finished dressing, and threw open the window shutters, allowing the pale winter sunshine to penetrate the room, she felt a sudden exhilarating warmth which seemed to come in with it, and touch her tenderly.

There were present in her mind just now many things which did not allow her to dwell upon any one subject exclusively. They came forward in quiet succession, and repeated themselves endlessly. The mystery of Miss Héricourt and Margaret was foremost among them. Once or twice she thought to see in some vague, quick impression the probable solution of the riddle; but, when she seized it, it grew fainter, and dissolved gradually in her grasp. Then Lamont, too, rising before her in imagination, always with the same look of sorrowful inquiry, would cause her frequently to bury her face in both hands to shut out the vision which even then refused to disappear. Sometimes he recurred to her memory like a recollection of childish days, indistinct and imperfect; and she would seek in vain to recall his face. In spite of her efforts, she saw nothing but a confusion of outlines with no distinguishing trait. "Can I have forgotten him?" she would ask herself in despair. "How is it that his features are lost to me while my heart remembers?"

But Lamont was still there, although his presence was not always made apparent. By patiently waiting for the right moment, he was visible to her vivid fancy in various forms. Now in his priestly robes of gold cloth and delicate lace; then in his straight black cassock, which increased his height, and lent additional stateliness to his well-made figure; and again, as he had appeared in the *plaza*, the victim of an outraged populace, with the warm sunbeams dancing on his pale, blood-stained face. Many times, too, she recalled the scene at the convent, where Lamont, sitting in the twilight, had related the story of his love, and craved her comprehension. What had become of him since then? Whither had he gone?

She sat for a while this morning, gazing now and then at the busy street, and thinking alternately of Lamont, Miss Héricourt, and the Hovedens.

“What wonderful changes occur in one’s life!” she said to herself thoughtfully. “To-day we are not as we were yesterday, and to-morrow we shall be still different.” Her glance wandered to a rose-bush which stood on her window-bench. Some of the flowers were falling to pieces, others just budding from the stalk. The leaves, which only a few hours before were green, now had a yellow tinge,—the first sign of approaching decay.

“Soon it will pass away to be forgotten,” thought Cordelia. “Shall we, too, I wonder, die, forget, and be lost from the memory of others? If so, to what end are our joys, our passions, and this constant striving to reach something we can never attain?”

She stood for a moment regarding the flower, but turned away presently to dress herself for the street. Catching sight of her face in the small mirror of her toilet-table, she bent forward, and examined it attentively. Yes, it had lost some of its freshness undoubtedly, and bore traces of deep anxiety. But these would be removed under the healthier influences which she was confident were in store for her.

As she was about to leave the room, a servant met her, and handed her a note. Cordelia, her fingers trembling with expectation, tore it quickly open. It was from Mrs. Hoveden, who begged Miss Héricourt, if disengaged, to come to her as soon as possible.

“Certainly, this is encouraging,” thought Cordelia. “She can want to see me for one purpose only.”

She looked at the address on the note, and, going downstairs rather more hastily than usual, left the house. The sun was shining gayly, and the slight fall of snow which covered the ground glistened in the light. She was oppressed by none of the nervousness of uncertainty. It was not that she was absolutely sure of having her hopes fulfilled, for that would have been both foolish and groundless. But she was animated by a spirit of expectancy,

which seemed to have generated spontaneously within her. She thought a great deal about the Hovedens. There was something in them — perhaps their comprehension and sympathy — that attracted her. The Professor, especially, interested her; and she could understand her father's liking for him.

When she reached the house, and was admitted to the luxurious drawing-room, a hundred different reflections assailed her. Since her home had been broken up by the death of Major Héricourt, and the circumstances that followed it, she had enjoyed but few comforts. She noted now the elegant surroundings, taking from them a certain exquisite enjoyment. As she sat buried in the depths of an easy-chair, the gold embroidery of which glittered in the red glow of the firelight, she partly closed her eyes, and allowed her thoughts to wander unrestrained. Was it remarkable that they reverted with a sudden bound, as it were, to the cathedral at Santa Fe, as she had seen it some months ago? True, the walls were only of rough *adobe*; but this was forgotten when one penetrated the interior, where the light was subdued, as it was in this drawing-room, and where the tall candles on the altar illuminated the crude but effective decorations. There had been, perhaps, more sober brilliancy in that rude, unpretending building than here, where an artistic taste and a feminine refinement predominated. The soft clouds of fragrant incense floating over the tawdry flowers and waxen images idealized them, for the moment, into spiritual beauty and grace. And as they rose higher and higher in faint bluish lines, which lost themselves in the dull atmosphere above, the strong, clear tones of the priest grew more impressive. One form there was to which the ecclesiastical robes had seemed especially adapted, and this figure had been the central object in those scenes.

When Padre Lamont retired to the sacristy at the conclusion of mass, the words he had spoken seemed to linger and hover in the air like a sound which melts gradually away in the distance. Even when it had apparently ceased, some trace of his presence still remained.

It was this distinct personality which separated Lamont from all others Cordelia had ever known, and made his influence at once general and special. When she had first seen him, she had been struck by his resolute voice, and his broad forehead, upon which truth had written its name. Since then — ah! since then she had doubted and repulsed him. He had passed as completely from her life as had the days she had lived, and which were buried past recall. As she sat motionless, allowing her fancy to place before her a series of vivid pictures, she felt an intense sadness at this last thought of Lamont. A moment longer she contemplated his image; and then both he and the cathedral faded from view just as the handle of the door was gently turned, and Mrs. Hoveden entered the room. Cordelia opened her half-closed eyes. All had vanished save the drawing-room, into whose sombre recesses the fire threw gleams of ruddy light. Had she been dreaming? No: it had been too real for a dream, and dreams are quickly forgotten. It was like an actual experience, and she would store it away in her memory until chance should call it forth again.

“How kind of you to come so soon!” said Mrs. Hoveden, advancing with extended hand.

“I was going out for a walk just as your note reached me, and I thought it would be as well to come here as go elsewhere,” said Cordelia frankly. “Besides, I did not know but the matter might be pressing: you remember your note said ‘as soon as possible.’”

“Yes; I believe it did: and, to go straight to the point, Miss Héricourt, I have a proposition to make to you,”

said Mrs. Hoveden with resolution. "You told us last evening, that you were qualified to take a position as governess. Are you prepared to repeat that statement?" She smiled, and looked at Cordelia encouragingly.

"Yes: I think so. I would never make a remark of that kind without having considered it well beforehand. I have not much knowledge, it is true; but I try to learn as I live. I am sure that to-day I know more than I did yesterday, and such acquirements as I have I am able to share." She smiled, too, as she spoke.

"You have confidence, I see, in spite of your modesty," said Mrs. Hoveden, laughing lightly. "I have no doubt you know more than you wish to confess. But a student is not always able to be a teacher."

"True," said Cordelia, a little doubtfully. "So far as actual teaching goes, I have had but slender experience. I can only judge of my capability by the results of efforts made while in Santa Fe. I taught many children there, and I think they were the better for it."

"Of course," said Mrs. Hoveden kindly, "I was only joking when I ventured to question your merit as a teacher. I can see that you have perseverance; and, in using that term, I say a great deal."

"Have you, then, found some occupation for me?" asked Cordelia, framing the question without hesitation. "If so, I can never thank you enough."

"It is for you to decide, Miss Héricourt. Mr. Hoveden and I thought you might like to instruct our little girl, Elfrida. She is ten years of age, and of a peculiar temperament. I do not send her to school; because, being different from other children, she is better disciplined at home. I prefer that she should remain as much as possible under my influence. Do you not agree with me?"

"Yes, although I have never known what a mother's influence is," said Cordelia. "I often wonder whether I

should have grown up very unlike myself at present if I had had my mother with me. But, Mrs. Hoveden," she continued after a pause, "I do not know how to be sufficiently grateful for your generous offer." She hesitated, and tears rose to her eyes. "It is so much more than I had any right to expect," she said.

"Then, you accept," said Mrs. Hoveden re-assuringly. "How pleased Mr. Hoveden will be, and how glad I am! But I have something else to say, Miss Héricourt. If you undertake to teach Elfrida, you must come to live here. I want you to be a constant companion to the child as well as a governess: you will understand why when you see her. And now we must decide upon your salary."

"That shall be left entirely to you," said Cordelia quickly. "I cannot tell you how your kindness affects me. Yesterday I was alone, and without resources: now you offer me occupation, and a home besides. It is more than I deserve: it is too much." She spoke with emotion, and for a moment all was misty before her eyes. "It is wonderful," she said presently, "to think of joys and benefits derived from strangers, while those who are nearer to us, and presumably interested in our welfare, often make every endeavor to avoid even a glance in our direction. Upon what is based the feeling which draws us to those who are unknown to us, and raises immense barriers between ourselves and our relations? Can you explain it?"

"I think blood has very little to do with affection," said Mrs. Hoveden thoughtfully. "What we seek principally in life are natures in harmony with our own, and these are what we seldom find within the precincts of our family. In fact," she added, smiling, "this is one of the Professor's pet theories. He asserts that brothers and sisters, parents and children, are naturally antagonistic, and that they are only enabled to live together by means of acquired traits, and an enormous amount of cultivation."

"Oh! it cannot be so bad as that," said Cordelia, unable to refrain from laughing. "The Professor's theory may be true in some cases, but these I am sure are in the minority. See, though, how far we have wandered from our subject. I was going to ask some questions about your little girl. Now that I am to superintend her education, I am anxious to know her. Is she at home? Can I see her?"

"I hoped you would ask to see her; for, in spite of her strange ways, I am very proud of her. You will pardon my vanity?"

"I do not call it vanity. Pray bring her to me," said Cordelia.

Mrs. Hoveden left the room, and returned almost immediately, leading by the hand a little girl, so delicately and slightly formed that she seemed a fairy rather than a creature of flesh and blood. Her skin was almost waxen in its whiteness, save on the cheeks, where a faint pink color came and went; and her long yellow hair hung in loose curls upon her shoulders. Her dress, of a quaint cut and fashion, lent to her small figure an air of distinction and originality. As she raised her large violet-blue eyes to those of Cordelia, there was in them an expression of dignity mingled with coquetry, any thing but childlike, and which gave to the small face the appearance of having by chance been placed upon the wrong body. But almost instantly the look vanished, giving place to one of subdued, wondering inquiry; and then she was a very child indeed, almost infantile in her personality.

"This is Miss Héricourt, Elfrida," said Mrs. Hoveden, placing a hand on each shoulder of the child. "She is coming to live with us and teach you, if you will promise to be a good girl, and do nothing to vex her."

"She could do no wrong, I am sure," said Cordelia, drawing the diminutive figure toward her with a kindly

movement. "Will you love me, Elfrida, and learn what I shall try to teach you?"

"Oh! I know a great deal already," said the child, in a light, sweet tone, quite in keeping with her dainty form. "I know perhaps more than you do."

"Fie, Elfrida! you should not speak so," said her mother reprovingly. "Were you to study for years, you would not know so much as Miss Héricourt does. I am ashamed when you say such silly things."

Elfrida made no answer. She stood for a moment regarding Cordelia doubtfully, but in no wise abashed by her mother's words. Presently she ran forward impulsively, and, throwing her arms about Cordelia's neck, kissed her repeatedly.

"I am naughty," she whispered. "But I will love you, and learn whatever you like."

"What a charming child!" exclaimed Cordelia with genuine enthusiasm. "She has an individuality of her own at the age of ten. How many of us have it at fifty? Do you know much, Elfrida? Can you tell me what you have already learned?"

"When you come to teach me, I will do so," answered the child. "But I will dance for you now." She raised her little arms above her head with an easy gesture, and again the coquettish look came into her eyes. "See," she cried in her sweet voice, "how well I can dance." She threw back her head, and in another moment was moving back and forth over the carpet with a quick, graceful step. The firelight shot up joyfully into yellow and purple flame, and threw fantastic reflections on the child's dress as she swept lightly by, and passed into the gloom at the far end of the room. There she paused, and a little mocking laugh broke from her.

Cordelia watched her, half fascinated. Could this be a child, — this beautiful, self-possessed creature about

whom lingered an indistinct air of mystery? How fanciful a picture she made, standing there, a spot of light in the semi-darkness, and bending forward to regard Cordelia with that mocking laugh!

"Come, foolish Elfrida," said Mrs. Hoveden, "and run away to your nurse. Miss Héricourt does not care to see you dance."

"Oh! but I do," exclaimed Cordelia eagerly. "Pray dance some more, Elfrida."

But, as if suddenly overcome by a spirit of contrariety, the child drew herself up, and resumed her usual attitude.

"I have done; no more," she said, approaching Cordelia with a delicate, airy tread. "When you come to teach me, I will show you how many things I can do. Will you come soon?"

"Whenever your mamma wishes, dear."

"The sooner the better," said Mrs. Hoveden. "You see, she is in need of some training. Her unconventionality, if unchecked, may cause her to grow up very different from what she ought to be. And now, Elfrida, go up-stairs to Mary, and let me talk to Miss Héricourt."

Elfrida, who had been looking attentively at her mother, now came close to her, and smiled. "You want to talk about me, mamma, and you do not wish me to hear?" she asked, with a quick glance at Cordelia.

"At all events, we can converse better without you," said Mrs. Hoveden, laughing.

"Very well," answered the child with sudden gravity. "Good-by, good-by." She nodded, or rather bowed, to Cordelia, hesitated for a moment, and then with a little, rippling laugh, ran from the room.

"She is a strange child," said Cordelia. "I have never seen one like her. There is something intangible about her, and I fear almost to touch her."

"Yes, she is very peculiar," said Mrs. Hoveden; "and I often wonder whence she derives her odd ways. She is not like the Professor or me in any respect. But she has a kind, impulsive heart, and a quick intelligence,—too quick, if any thing; so you must use your discretion in regard to the studies you give her. Whatever they may be, you will find her a willing pupil. When will you begin?"

"As soon as possible, if you have quite decided to engage me. Would the day after to-morrow do?"

"Perfectly. Make your arrangements to come here then; and if, in the mean while, I can help you in any way, you must let me know."

"Your kindness really touches me," said Cordelia, "and I can assure you it is not misplaced. But I have no occasion to trespass upon your generosity. The few preparations which are necessary, I can easily make alone."

She rose to go, feeling imbued with a fresh sensation of strength and courage. At last she was on the track which would lead her to the end so long desired. The vision of old Miss Héricourt and Margaret seemed to become clearer and more definite; and perhaps other thoughts, too, were nearer the possibility of realization.

Later, when she was again in her own room, thinking intently of what had passed, pleasure was mingled with her hope and thankfulness. It would be a new experience to live in this family, where the characters of the Professor and his wife, and the quaint originality of little Elfrida, interested her profoundly. She was haunted by the recollection of the tiny figure whose violet-blue eyes, clear and innocent, and withal so grave and mature, seemed filled with much that was too deep for childish utterance.

"They are honest, affectionate eyes too," said Cordelia, smiling as she recalled the dainty form moving swiftly over the floor in the changing firelight. "And I think I

shall be happy there,—far happier than I have been since” —

She did not finish the sentence ; for she had become suddenly thoughtful, as though some other vision had come before her, and overshadowed that of the child.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A LITTLE LATER.

“Ignorance is not a necessary evil. It is not produced by any defect in the organism, since there is no man who is not endowed with a memory capable of containing infinitely more facts than are required for the discovery of the greatest truths.” — HELVETIUS.

AFTER Cordelia became an inmate of the Professor's house, the months rolled quietly by, uneventful in a certain sense, yet crowded with expectations never realized, and hopes constantly deferred. For, in all this time, no news could be obtained of Miss Héricourt or Margaret, notwithstanding the efforts made by the Professor to gain information concerning them. It was the Aldergroves, mother and daughter, for whom he sought; but Cordelia did not know this. She was still convinced that her aunt had been the victim of some terrible disaster, — that her naturally weak mind had perhaps given way altogether, leaving her irresponsible for her actions; and the Professor never tried to undeceive the girl by presenting to her his own version of the affair. Since nothing definite could apparently be learned, he preferred to remain silent; and perhaps he did well. Gradually the subject, which at first had been much talked of among them, was dropped, and only occasionally alluded to. Cordelia would, however, often note an expression on the Professor's face very different from his ordinary one, and would glance at him with significant inquiry; but he always shook his head,

and, when he spoke, turned his remarks into another channel.

Still, she could not help thinking of it all, and dwelling upon it, more, very likely, than was good for her; while, as for the Professor, the images of Margaret and of Mrs. Aldergrove were constantly before him, surrounded by the luxuries which Cordelia's money had given them. He dreamed of these women by night, and by day their presence rarely left him. Yet what could he do? Which way must he turn in order to find them?

In Cordelia's moments of sadness, which were not infrequent, it was little Elfrida who brought the smile back to her lips again. Often the child would enter, uninvited, her governess's room, and, running toward her with a merry light in her eyes, exclaim, —

“Why are you so grave, Miss Héricourt? What makes you sad? When I am grown up, I shall never sit like that: I shall laugh and dance all the time.”

Then, perhaps, before Cordelia could reply, the child had flitted away again; and the clear, ringing tones of her voice came floating from a distance. It relieved Cordelia merely to see a creature so mirthful, and free from care. And yet, notwithstanding her prediction of continual gayety, Elfrida sometimes shed tears of childish passion, when her tiny form trembled with anger, and her sweet voice was drowned in convulsive sobs. She was a strange child indeed, impetuous and wilful on occasions, but always affectionate, and retaining, regardless of circumstances, that mysterious grace and coquettish gravity which seemed so out of place in her. During her lessons she was generally attentive, and quick to grasp a meaning; but frequently, in the midst of a serious discussion, she would spring to her feet, and, with hands gracefully posed, dance lightly backward and forward over the floor, laughing the while at Cordelia's consternation.

"See, Miss Héricourt, this is a step I taught myself yesterday ; and I danced it this morning for Mary. I forgot until now that you had not seen it. You could not dance like that, could you, Miss Héricourt?"

"No, dear," Cordelia would reply. "You dance very prettily ; but will you not wait until lessons are over, to show me your new step? Your mamma would not like to see you dance now."

"Yes, yes, I know! I am coming directly," Elfrida would exclaim. And then, letting her arms fall suddenly to her side, she would return to her seat, and resume her studies.

It was a peaceful life which Cordelia led, broken only by memories of the past, which extended beyond their boundaries, touching the present, and casting at the same time a shadowy reflection across the future. But all the while her nature grew and expanded into womanliness of the purest type. Of what priceless value are even a few brief years in early life to the man or woman who has seen and endured with the intention of profiting by experience! Life surely is not made up of time, but rather of thought, feeling, and action, independently of days. Children sometimes are older than we.

Cordelia Héricourt had a nature which demanded continual growth. The wisdom of to-day with her was often the ignorance of to-morrow. Novelty she did not seek, but rather those things which have always existed, the grand truths of nature that never change. To be brought face to face with one of these, knowing that it would remain as it was in spite of every variation of time, was an intense delight to her. She did not, however, grow cynical, as is too often the case with those who investigate the groundwork of things, and analyze the human character. The knowledge, for instance, that self-love is man's ruling passion, inspired her with pity rather than ill-nature.

All the petty weaknesses, invisible to unpractised eyes, which her own keen glance detected, served only as a basis for speculation and inference. But in this way her views became enlarged, and her faculty of perception so acute, that it required but slight effort on her part in order to discover much.

The Professor and his wife, besides being intellectual, possessed in a marked degree that capacity for comprehension which is sometimes of more value than actual wisdom. They had, moreover, strong powers of appreciation; and, to them both, Cordelia was a constant source of wonder and delight.

To observe the gradual unfolding of the girl's tastes and ideas, to see the slow but perfect growth of her nature, was more interesting to the Professor than any thing else. So well did he understand her, that often a word or a look from her spoke eloquently to him of many things. He could see plainly when doubt assailed her, and was always ready to help her by giving her the benefit of his own mature judgment. When this was successfully carried out, his delight almost equalled hers.

Mrs. Hoveden often watched them with deep interest. By following Cordelia in her steady march onward, she herself had advanced; and unconsciously her views and opinions were colored by a delicate reflection from those of the girl. But she could not help feeling amused sometimes by the change which had overtaken the Professor, and in her heart she was grateful for the nobler vein which association with Cordelia had given to his manhood. She was not jealous of this influence; and, during the long winter evenings, nothing gave her more pleasure than to sit silent, and listen to them both, as, deep in the discussion of some fresh topic, each would present ideas and opinions often with startling effect.

Pervading all this were a peace and gentleness which

made the home almost an ideal one, — Cordelia, with her elevated sentiments, and quiet dignity of manner, going always to the lowest depth of all that could be penetrated; the two older people, possessing strong individuality of a different type, the one eager to grasp the better part of all, the other developing more slowly perhaps, but yet surely; and, last of all, the little, mystical Elfrida, flitting from one to the other, anxious apparently to gain something from each; as the humming-bird, swaying to and fro, extracts perfume and sweetness from every flower.

Peaceful indeed! and yet, did no regrets come to mar this existence? Were there not thoughts which tore themselves forcibly from the present to dwell in the past? Did a day ever exist when the cloudless sky, from dawn to sunset, was marred by no tiny speck? Surely not; and it is, perhaps, this very impossibility of perfection, or entire content, which spurs us onward, always pursuing, and never attaining, but meeting withal, in the search, much that endows life for a while with pure delight. Half our pleasure, in fact, consists in striving for that which we cannot reach. A child chasing a butterfly across a summer field knows, perhaps, that his tiny hands will never grasp it; but he is joyous in the pursuit. Indeed, could he seize the brilliant creature, would he not hold it for a brief second only, casting it aside, in all probability, immediately afterward?

So likewise, if Cordelia had unsatisfied desires, they were animated by the hope of final gratification; and in pursuing them she was happy. We are permitted to come no nearer to perfect enjoyment than this. In every heart lingers some expectation, never destined to be fulfilled perhaps, but which we nourish cheerfully with hope, until at last the spark of life dies out, and we and our secret longing are buried together.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A MEETING.

“ ‘Hélas!’ disait Zadig, ‘j’ai été longtemps couché sur ces herbes sèches et piquantes. Je suis maintenant sur le lit de roses, mais quel sera le serpent?’ ”

“It is a great disappointment to me, Maria,” said the Professor one evening, when he and his wife happened to be alone together; “but I fear the Héricourt affair is hopeless.” He put down the paper he was reading, and looked gravely at his companion.

“I heartily wish it were otherwise,” said Mrs. Hoveden, with a sigh. “Cordelia is a noble girl, and the recollection of her wrongs always makes me unhappy. She seems contented, however: do you not think so?”

“Contented? yes; for she understands how to adapt herself to the inevitable. She will always be contented, having discovered long ago the uselessness of complaint. Cordelia has become a philosopher,” said the Professor.

“And I am glad of it,” said Mrs. Hoveden. “It shows, does it not, that the little incidents of our lives are the principal agents in forming our characters? Cordelia with a different story to tell would not be Cordelia at all.”

“Where is she this evening?” inquired the Professor, glancing about as if he had just missed her.

“In her room, reading a new book. Have you noticed that she rarely mentions her trouble? I can see, however,

that her mind still dwells upon it. She has much fortitude for one so young."

"So far as that goes, it is the young alone who should display fortitude," answered the Professor. "And why not? They have strength and courage and hope. If they are wanting in these qualities, it is owing to another which overwhelms them. I mean indolence." He brought his hand down upon the table forcibly, as though he were delivering a lecture.

"Cordelia certainly is not indolent," said his wife, with deliberation. "Indeed, I have never seen one who possessed a more active temperament, both mentally and physically. Did Miss Aldergrove resemble her in this respect?"

"How should I know?" asked the Professor indifferently. He was always strangely anxious to avoid any discussion with his wife in regard to the journey across the plains. He feared, perhaps, to inadvertently reveal the suspicions which rested on his mind, and gave him no peace night or day. Ever since Cordelia had become an inmate of his house, the certainty that his view of the case was the correct one had grown more distinct; and with this idea came a firmer determination to see justice done. He often sat lost in reflection, his thoughts centring, with gloomy persistence, upon the facts of the case; and Mrs. Hoveden, watching him, wondered what it could be that occupied him so entirely. She had been on the point several times of putting the question to him boldly, but somehow the words refused to frame themselves upon her lips.

"You remember," the Professor continued finally, "I saw very little of the ladies. Their characters, therefore, cannot be familiar to me. I do not think I ever heard Miss Aldergrove speak, except on the day her cousin disappeared." A sardonic smile passed over his lips as

he uttered the word "cousin." Mrs. Hoveden, however, did not appear to notice it.

"Is Burton still engaged upon the search?" she asked, after a short silence.

"Yes; he has left no stone unturned: and I have spared no expense, as you know. But, so far, it has resulted in nothing," said the Professor, with melancholy resignation. "I saw Burton yesterday, and had a long talk with him about it. He spoke of a friend or acquaintance of his, who had lived in Santa Fe in '54 or thereabouts, and said he would be sure to know the Héricourts. I asked him to send this friend to call upon me this evening if possible. I hardly think, however, that his information, if he have any, will be of much use."

"It might be," said Mrs. Hoveden encouragingly. "Who is he? and what is his name?"

"I do not know who he is; but his name is Lamont, — Paul Lamont. Burton has known him, it seems, for some time, but neglected to mention him before."

"Lamont!" repeated Mrs. Hoveden, with a look of puzzled reflection. "The name is not unfamiliar. Surely, I have heard it pronounced recently, or, at all events, one similar."

"Very likely," said the Professor laconically. He had dropped his head upon his hand, and seemed to be thinking of something else.

"I have heard the name of Lamont within twenty-four hours," persisted Mrs. Hoveden; "and, if I mistake not, it was pronounced by Cordelia."

"By Cordelia!" repeated the Professor. "Why," he resumed, with a sudden change of manner, "I recollect meeting a priest of that name at the Héricourts' house. I had forgotten the incident until this moment. He came to get money for some charity, or to say prayers for the repose of the Major's soul, or something of that sort. He

was a fine-looking fellow, I think; although I can recall him but indistinctly. This Lamont, however, cannot be the same. I wish he were, for he might give me some valuable information."

"A Roman-Catholic priest! Of course, he is the one whose name sounds familiar. I have often heard Cordelia speak of Padre Lamont. She must have known him well."

"It would be strange indeed if there were two of them in Santa Fe at the same time," said the Professor reflectively. "The one who is coming here cannot be a priest. At least, Burton did not say so. But perhaps it is not so extraordinary after all. He may have had a brother, — the priest, I mean. In fact, the whole city of Santa Fe may have been full of Lamonts, for all I know."

"True; or the priest may have left the Church," suggested Mrs. Hoveden, unwilling to renounce the possibility of identity between the Lamont of New Mexico and the Lamont of New York.

"Nonsense!" cried the Professor. "Left the Church! Why, what can you be thinking of? Had he done so, he would have gone to rack and ruin at once."

"I do not see the necessity for that," said Mrs. Hoveden. "Pray, what should send him there?"

"Partly inclination, I suppose," said the Professor, laughing, "and partly the curses of those who remained behind. But listen! Is not that the bell?"

"Yes; and you probably wish to be alone with this mysterious visitor," said Mrs. Hoveden, rising. "Shall I mention his name to Cordelia?"

"By no means!" exclaimed the Professor hastily. "If he is the man she used to know, I shall send for her later. It will be time enough to speak of him then."

Mrs. Hoveden withdrew softly from the room by a door at the back of the apartment, just as another door at the front opened to admit Lamont's tall figure. The mellow

lamplight falling across his face revealed his well-poised head, and strong, sharply-cut features. He did not hold himself quite so erect now as formerly, and the dignity of his bearing had lost its trace of haughtiness. When he spoke, however, the full, round tones of his voice were imbued with the same feminine sweetness as of old.

"Professor Hoveden, I believe," he said, inclining his head slightly.

The Professor rose, and extended his hand with a cordial gesture. "You are Mr. Lamont, of course," he answered. "Pray be seated."

Lamont took the chair from which Mrs. Hoveden had just risen; regarding his companion, the while, with close scrutiny. "This is not the first time we have met," he said interrogatively. "Were you not in Santa Fe several years ago?"

"Yes; and I remember seeing you there," said the Professor with delight. "In fact, my wife and I were just discussing the possibility"—He hesitated, casting a side-long glance at the other's dress. "You see," he went on awkwardly, "you were differently situated then; and I hardly thought the Lamont mentioned by my lawyer, Burton, could be Padre Lamont, the priest. When you entered the room, however, I recognized you instantly, and with ill-concealed gratification I am sure."

"I thank you for your courtesy," said Lamont deferentially. "I, too, recognized you." Then, after a pause, he added, "I understand to what you refer. You did not know that I resigned from the priesthood shortly after you were in New Mexico?"

"No: I had no means of hearing any thing at that time from Santa Fe. Have you been here since then?"

"Yes," said Lamont musingly, "and leading a peculiar life,—an unpleasant one in some respects, but one to be persevered in for many reasons."

"How odd that you should be the same Lamont!" said the Professor. "I saw you but once in Santa Fe. It was at the Héricourts', if I remember rightly."

"The Héricourts!" Lamont had started at the mention of the name, and then repeated it almost tenderly. For an instant afterwards he was silent, overcome by a host of varied recollections. This name, which he had not heard pronounced for so long, carried him back to a period that rose up in his memory like a half-forgotten dream. A moment ago the Professor had been nothing to him personally, but now he seemed bound to him by close ties of friendship. He was like a link connecting two portions of a broken chain. Had he not known Cordelia? Had he not spoken to her, and heard her voice?

"Of course, you remember them," continued the Professor. "I met you there just before the ladies of the family, with one exception, left Santa Fe for the East. You were their confessor, I think."

"The Héricourts' confessor, and their friend as well," said Lamont with a sad smile. "I cannot recall that part of my life without a sense of regret. I do not mean that I would act differently were I again placed in similar circumstances. But I lost much then that I can never hope to regain."

"I can well understand that," said the Professor, with a smile which somehow faltered before the other's glance. "In renouncing your vows, you entered naturally upon an existence far removed from that you had been leading. Can we ever alter our manner of living without regret?"

"It seems not. We are bound to have regrets whether we go forward, or remain stationary, — whether we pursue a particular course, or not. It matters little after all. Man is doomed to mourn the absence of that which he has not. Can it make any real difference whether he does so

in one condition or another? Had I remained a priest I should have been miserable. How, then, can I hope to be less so, now that I am a priest no longer?"

He said this in so sad a tone that the Professor raised his eyes in mute sympathy. For an instant there was silence between them. Then he said deliberately, —

"There is misery and misery. The regrets you would have suffered by remaining in the priesthood are not of the same kind as those which now sway you?"

"No, of course they are not. But they are there, nevertheless."

"You speak with strange hopelessness," said the Professor earnestly. "You must have met with bitter disappointment." His tone was half-questioning, but Lamont made no reply. He sat gazing absently at the far end of the room, where a hanging lamp of silver, suspended to the ceiling by heavy chains, shed a soft yellow glow upon the carpet. As he looked, Cordelia Héricourt seemed to rise slowly up before him, and stand, a white ethereal figure, in the midst of the light. A golden radiance emanated from her apparently, deepening in color, and spreading wider until it stretched across the whole apartment: then suddenly it faded, and the shadowy form disappeared.

He roused himself, and turned to the Professor. "I understand from Burton," he said, striving to utter the words naturally, "that you wished to see me about something connected with Santa Fe. If my knowledge can be of any service to you, pray command me. My thoughts appear a little confused, doubtless; but you will pardon this, I am sure. It is not often that Santa Fe and the events that happened there are brought before me as they have been this evening."

"I thank you for speaking so frankly," said the Professor; "and I am grateful to you for coming to see me. I shall not detain you long. Were you in Santa Fe when

the ladies of the Héricourt family set out for the United States? It was just after the Major died."

"Yes, I recollect the circumstance perfectly," Lamont replied unhesitatingly, although with some surprise. What could the Professor have to do with the Héricourts or their journey, he wondered. He glanced at his companion with evident curiosity, feeling a peculiar impression of something unpleasant to come.

"Perhaps you can tell me who composed the party," said the Professor.

"Certainly. Old Miss Héricourt went accompanied by her cousins, the Aldergroves," replied Lamont, still speculating upon what possible interest this could have for his interlocutor.

"And Miss Cordelia Héricourt?" inquired the Professor eagerly.

"Miss Cordelia was too ill to go abroad, so she remained at the convent of Our Lady of Guadalupe. I remember, as though it were yesterday, the day she went there," said Lamont thoughtfully. "Old Miss Héricourt set out for France to obtain some money she and her niece had recently inherited. The Aldergroves intended to accompany her as far as Havre."

"And have you ever heard of them since? Did Miss Héricourt get her fortune?"

"I do not know positively, but I have no reason to suppose otherwise," said Lamont. "There is little possibility of failure in such matters where strict formalities have to be complied with."

"Then, you will be surprised at what I have to tell you," said the Professor significantly. "Miss Héricourt did not get the money. At least, there is every indication that she did not; nor has her niece, Cordelia, received a penny of it."

"What do you mean?" asked Lamont quickly.

"Do you never read the 'Personal' column in 'The Herald?'" inquired the Professor. "Is it possible you have seen no announcements of rewards offered for the recovery of Miss Héricourt, or for any information concerning her?"

Lamont shook his head. "No," he said wonderingly, "I have seen nothing of the kind. Is Miss Héricourt lost, or dead? Please speak more clearly." He was evidently agitated, and he looked at the Professor with painful earnestness.

"That is what we cannot discover," said the Professor. "One of the ladies who crossed the plains disappeared mysteriously in the night. I journeyed in the same stage-coach with them, and they were partly under my charge. They represented themselves to be the two Héricourts and Mrs. Aldergrove. The lost lady was declared to be Mrs. Aldergrove, but many circumstances lead to the belief that it was Miss Héricourt. You know of the extraordinary likeness between them."

"Good heavens!" cried Lamont vehemently. "You surely cannot mean—no, that would be too horrible." He sat gazing at the Professor with an expression of startled incredulity.

"I see you understand me," said the other gravely. "My suspicions are well grounded, else I would not venture to state them. The ladies travelled under assumed names. One disappeared, and nothing has since been heard of the others. I think the Aldergroves pushed old Miss Héricourt out of the stage, and went to France to obtain the money, representing themselves to be the rightful heirs. The peculiar resemblance between the cousins would make the deception an easy one to practise."

Lamont shook his head in assent, but made no answer. He was overcome with horror by the Professor's words,

and for a moment was too bewildered to speak. "Surely," he said presently, "this is only supposition. How can you know it positively?"

"Because a person calling herself Miss Héricourt has claimed and received the money, and yet no news can be obtained of her; nor has Cordelia received her share."

"Then, you have seen Cordelia, — you know where she is?" cried Lamont, a sudden light coming into his eyes. Old Miss Héricourt and the Aldergroves faded completely away before the magic of this other name, and the vague hope called up by it.

"She has been in my house for two years," said the Professor quietly.

"Here — here in this house — now?" Lamont closed his eyes, and for an instant the Professor seemed an indistinct form barely visible in the distance. There was a quick, joyous, ringing sound in his ears; and the Past, rising slowly up, receded gradually, until but a tiny speck remained to mark its existence.

"Yes," he heard the Professor say in answer to his question. "I met her by accident one day, and mistook her for the Miss Héricourt who had crossed the plains with me. I had the whole story then from her lips, — not the whole story exactly, for she has no suspicion of the Aldergroves' villany. She thinks to this day, that some accident has happened to her aunt, — that she is dead, or so situated that she cannot communicate with her. I, of course, know better; but I have never had the heart to undeceive the poor girl. Besides, what good would it do? There is no chance of being able to make the truth public. I have advertised everywhere for the Aldergroves; but they have disappeared as completely as if the earth had opened and swallowed them up, money and all."

Lamont scarcely noted the words, and yet every one of them fell distinctly upon his ear. Cordelia here! Under

the same roof with him! Was he dreaming? Was the Professor really sitting opposite? Were the red glow of the firelight, the fantastic shadows dancing on the wall, and the pale rays which fell from the silver lamp, illusions all, or did he actually see them? Outside, in the street, a procession was passing with a band of music. The strains from the instruments came to him like an echo afar off, as did also the heavy tramp of feet from the mob running along the sidewalk. In a few moments the sounds died entirely away; and, raising his eyes, Lamont saw the Professor regarding him with a puzzled expression.

"So Cordelia is here," he said, half to himself. "I knew I should see her again."

He returned the Professor's steady look with a smile. "You do not understand me, of course," he said. "I will try to tell you what I mean. I knew Cordelia Héricourt well at one time. I was her confessor, and we were friends besides. But duty, in calling me away from the priesthood, called me also from her. I have never seen her since I left Santa Fe; but many times, alone, and struggling slowly onward in a new career, I have thought of her, deserted by the ones who should carefully have guarded her, and cast among surroundings where a selfish interest was possibly ill concealed. It has come to me so forcibly at times, that I only wonder I thought so little of it when the matter was directly under my notice. You look at me in surprise; but, since I renounced the priesthood, many things have appeared to me in a light far different from that in which they formerly presented themselves. The position of Cordelia Héricourt is one of them. I wonder what sort of life she led in the convent after I left!" The somewhat mournful ring in his voice fell significantly upon the Professor's ears.

"She has never spoken of her life there," he answered. "It cannot be a pleasant subject."

"No doubt — no doubt," said Lamont reflectively, his thoughts going back to the Superior, whose disappointment at receiving no money he could well imagine. "Cordelia had a noble nature," he added, — "one not easily deterred from purposes marked out, and capable, also, of enduring much."

"I see that you know her well," said the Professor, with a genial smile. "I told you she had been with us for two years. During that time she has taught my little girl, and the result of her instruction need not be mentioned. Besides this, she has endeared herself to us in countless ways. We love her devotedly." He spoke feelingly, and, Lamont knew, sincerely.

"Yes," he said presently. "Her character is an uncommon one. When I knew her, she was, of course, much younger. I employ the term purposely; for, although only two or three years have elapsed since we last met, I know she has lived longer than that in experience. Poor girl! she has had a great deal to bear, but she doubtless has stood her trial bravely." He lay back in his chair, overcome by a sensation he could scarcely define. More than ever he wondered whether this scene, so vivid, so unexpected and emotional, could be real. His own calmness amazed him. How was it possible, that after so many years of patient waiting, sustained by a hope that threatened never to be realized, he could sit quietly here in the Professor's drawing-room, knowing that Cordelia was beneath the same roof, — that she was separated from him by a mere partition of brick and plaster? What manner of man had he become? Was his love dead? Had it spent itself in vain longing? Had so much of it been poured forth in prayer and solitude, that nothing remained to be laid at Cordelia's feet? He did not know. He was only conscious of a feeling of intense happiness. He would have asked nothing better than to remain alone in

this room, and bask in the present, whose broad day caused the shadows of the past to disappear. Surely, life is composed of a succession of existences, which spring forth, and then die to give place to others, like the plant continually putting forward leaves and shoots of tender green to bloom a while, and fade.

"I must take you into my confidence somewhat, if not altogether," said the Professor in a few moments. "Miss Cordelia, as I have intimated, knows nothing of my suspicions. In fact, I have revealed them to no one except yourself, — not even to my wife. Many times I have been on the point of telling all; but something, I know not what, prevented me. I suspected that all was not as it should be between the ladies, before we had been two days on the road; but I could not understand precisely what constituted the trouble. I remember speaking about it to a man named Glatz, who laughed at me, and called me an idiot. The affair had almost passed from my mind, when the accidental meeting with Miss Cordelia, and the recital of her story, brought it and much more forcibly before me. By the by, here is something which I should like you to examine." He rose, and, going toward a small ebony cabinet which stood in a corner of the room, unlocked one of its drawers, and drew therefrom an object which he handed to Lamont.

"A handkerchief! Is it connected in any way with the journey?" asked the latter, smoothing it upon his knee.

"The only trace we could obtain of the missing lady, besides a small piece of crape from her veil," said the Professor, leaning on the back of Lamont's chair. "It was lying in the road, and I picked it up near the spot where she must have fallen from the stage. Do you observe any peculiarity about it?"

"Nothing except this black border," said Lamont, look-

ing at it carefully. "Ah!" he exclaimed, "there is a name here, — that of Miss Anastasia Héricourt."

"Precisely," said the Professor, regarding him from over his gold-rimmed spectacles: "that is what I wanted you to see. Does it make the matter any clearer to you? Does it, in short, point to the missing lady?"

"I could not have believed it possible," said Lamont, in a horrified whisper.

"To my mind," continued the Professor, "this handkerchief proves that the Aldergroves tried to murder Miss Héricourt in order to obtain her money and Cordelia's."

"No: not murder, surely," Lamont replied quickly. "They may have pushed her out, — probably they did so, but hardly with the intention of killing her. A fall from a stage could not kill her."

"Then, they hoped the Indians would capture her, which amounts to the same thing," said the Professor decidedly. "Indeed, this must really have happened; as no sign of her was visible anywhere, and Indian trails were plentiful."

"How horrible! And you say nothing whatever can be learned in regard to the matter?"

"Nothing. We have advertised, offered rewards, and employed detectives, but without result. The Héricourt affair is still shrouded in mystery, — to Cordelia, at least; for, so far as I am concerned, there is no mystery about it. The Aldergroves are the people I want to find. But no trace of them can be discovered. They are probably abroad, living under an assumed name. Is it plain to you? Do you not see the whole thing?"

"Alas! I fear I do," said Lamont. "The Aldergroves never inspired me with confidence, but I hardly thought them so depraved as you have made them out to be." He sat for a moment in silence. "Would it be asking too much if I expressed a wish to see Miss Héricourt?" he said finally. "Will you send for her? Do not say who

is here, but ask her to come. We used to be friends once, and if she has not forgotten me" — He spoke in hardly audible tones, and with averted gaze, as though unwilling to meet the Professor's searching glance.

"Of course you shall see her," said the latter, rising. "I should have sent for her already, had I not, first of all, desired to speak with you privately. One word more before I go. Pray, do not mention all that we know of the matter. It can do no good, and would only serve to make the girl anxious. She shall be told every thing when the proper time comes."

"You can trust me," said Lamont, rising also, and answering the Professor's look frankly. "She shall hear nothing from me other than she already knows."

The Professor smiled approvingly, shook him by the hand, and then left the room. Lamont resumed his seat, and listened to the heavy tread ascending the staircase.

CHAPTER XXX.

A LIGHT BREAKS UPON CORDELIA.

“A Lucca ti vidi, a Pisa ti conobbi.”

FOR several moments Lamont did not move. He closed his eyes, and tried to collect his thoughts; but the air seemed filled with voices which interrupted his meditation with discordant sounds. The clock on the mantel-piece struck ten, and the final stroke reverberated throughout the room with a faint echo. Over the dial, Spring was represented by the gilt figure of a maiden. With one hand she held up the drapery of her robe, from the folds of which peeped a number of flowers. The other hand clasped a nosegay, that was pressed against her smiling lips, and appeared to send forth some of its fragrance into the atmosphere.

Lamont took a book from the table presently, and read a page or two; but the words conveyed no meaning to him: so he threw the volume aside, and, rising, paced the floor slowly. Certainly, the coming moment would be an episode in his life, the memory of which, whether for good or ill, would never leave him. He sought to picture to himself what Cordelia would be like. Should he find her changed? Had time softened her feelings toward him? The letter she had written to him just before his departure from Santa Fe was in his pocket now, and had been carried there ever since its receipt. He placed his hand

against his breast, and felt the paper with a touch that was almost caressing. Ah, no! he, at least, had not forgotten. His love was yet alive. He wished for the moment it were otherwise, — that the years which had rolled by slowly, obliterating in their passage so much, could have deadened, to some extent, the intensity of his passion for Cordelia. But it was not so.

He thought of this with a desperate resignation not devoid of bitterness. How intently had he longed for peace! For how many weary months had he striven to find happiness in the mere fulfilment of duty! And now, just when his efforts bade fair to prove successful, he saw himself, as it were, hurled back into the very whirlpool from which he had sought to escape. But even in the contemplation of this was a joy so profound, that he felt willing to give up much in order to experience it for a brief space of time.

He drew near to the door presently, and listened for the sound of Cordelia's footstep. All was silent, save for the monotonous ticking of the gilt clock, above whose dial the figure of Spring held up her blossom-laden robe. Could Cordelia have known who waited to receive her in that dimly lighted drawing-room, would she not have hastened?

He listened again with feverish expectancy, and detected at last the faint rustle of a woman's gown trailing over the stairs. Nearer it came, and still nearer. He withdrew farther into the room, holding his hands pressed tightly together. Would the door never open? Had the step passed on? No: a gentle touch was at that moment on the knob, and then Cordelia entered.

She came forward with an inquiring glance, as though expecting to meet a stranger. Her dress of plain black, relieved by a kerchief of white muslin crossed upon her breast, fell in straight folds to the floor; and her dark hair

was simply knotted at the back of her head. Lamont's impatient eyes noted all this at a glance, and saw, too, the sudden change which overspread her features as she recognized him.

"You? You here?" she said, drawing back, with a searching look into his face. "How is it possible?" She uttered the words wonderingly, regarding him as if hesitating to believe the testimony of her own senses.

"It is I, Cordelia; and you have not forgotten me!" he exclaimed, starting forward with outstretched hand. "I still occupy a place in your memory, is it not so?"

"Forgotten you!" Cordelia shook her head, and smiled. Something seemed to penetrate Lamont's heart like a ray of warm sunshine.

"How did you come here, if indeed it be really you?" she asked earnestly. "I cannot be dreaming, for I feel the warm clasp of your hand; and yet I do not understand it."

"I do not wonder at your astonishment," he said; "but it is really I, Paul Lamont, nevertheless. It is strange that we should meet thus after so long a separation. Is it fate, Cordelia?" he added, smiling.

"I know nothing of fate, but I am happy in seeing you again," she answered. "Will you believe me when I say your face is the only pleasant thing remaining of the past? It is what I think of and recall when I am sad."

"It must be your generosity which makes you speak so," he said gravely. "For I never brought you a moment's happiness. On the contrary, I did much to grieve you, and fill your pure mind with distrust."

"Let me tell you something," she said quickly. "Perhaps you will not care to hear it now: but my friendship—the old friendship, I mean—came back to me after you were gone; and, since then, contemplation and experience have strengthened it. Have you ever forgiven me for my

injustice toward you? You do not know how it has since preyed upon my mind, and how I have longed to see you, only that I might tell you of it. Besides" — She hesitated, and turned her head aside irresolutely.

"Cordelia, say no more, I implore you," cried Lamont. "You never did me wrong. You have nothing to regret, nor have I any thing to overlook. If at one time we did not understand each other fully, that time is past and gone. We meet now, I hope, having each grown somewhat in knowledge of the other; and I stretch toward you for the second time the hand of fellowship. Will you take it? It is more deeply lined, perhaps, than when your slender fingers first clasped it; but its pressure is a true one."

"You are too generous," she said, not without emotion. "But, if repentance can excuse my fault, it has been condoned long ago." She regarded him earnestly for a moment, and then, dropping his hand, seated herself in an easy-chair by the fire, inviting him to a place opposite.

"You have not told me how you came to be here," she said, after a short silence.

"Did I not? I have so much to say, that, doubtless, I forgot to explain my presence. I came to see Professor Hoveden on a matter of business. I met him once in Santa Fe at your house, and naturally we spoke of it. In the course of the conversation I learned that you were here, and you can imagine my pleasure; for, when I left you at Our Lady of Guadalupe, I never thought my eyes would rest again upon your face. Chance plays an important *rôle* in our lives, does it not?" He became suddenly grave, and spoke the last words in a tone of reflection.

"And did he tell you why I was here?" asked Cordelia, without replying to his question. "Do you know what has befallen me, — that I am alone in the world, and deprived of my fortune?"

"Yes," he answered simply. "I learned the story this evening. But you take the matter as it should be taken. I am glad to see this. Besides, you are contented here, if not absolutely happy; and your life is a peaceful one."

"Could it fail to be so among such kind friends as I have found?" she asked with a smile.

"The Professor seems to be a man of noble impulse," said Lamont. "You could not, I think, have a more fitting guardian than he. But tell me about your life at the convent after I left. Did the Superior" — He stopped abruptly, and then added, "You know I obtained some insight into her nature toward the last, and I have since feared her interest may not have been purely unselfish. How did she act when she discovered you had no money?"

"We will not talk of it," replied Cordelia hastily. "Whatever happened bears no relation to the present, and I have so much to be thankful for that I need not dwell upon trifles."

"I understand," he said gravely. Then, after a pause, he continued, "Did she ever speak of me? Did she ever view my conduct with more softness and lenity?"

"She spoke of you occasionally, but her thoughts about you remained unchanged. She is not one whose opinions in such a matter could be easily altered."

"And the Bishop," Lamont inquired eagerly. "Did he finally forgive me?"

"I do not know," said Cordelia. "I think he spoke of you once to the Superior, but the conversation was not repeated to me."

There was silence for a few moments, during which Lamont seemed plunged in thought. The clock ticked steadily on; and the figure of Spring continued to smile, with her gilt nosegay pressed to her lips. A painful stillness reigned without, broken now and then by the noise

of a passing carriage; and the fire, which but a moment before had blazed brightly up into the faces of the two figures seated beside it, died suddenly away, leaving only a heap of red embers.

"You have told me nothing of yourself," said Cordelia presently. "What life have you led since we parted? You have, perhaps, endured hardship; while I" —

"No: I have been fortunate enough," he interrupted. "For a long time, it is true, matters looked somewhat hopeless; but I have no reason to complain. I could not enter a profession, because I lacked the means required for study; but I had my books and my pen, and I made use of both."

"You are a journalist, then?"

"No; but I write special articles sometimes for the papers and magazines."

"And can you live by this?"

"Live! surely," he said, with a smile. "Luxuries I have not, of course; but I am comfortable enough. Besides, every year grows brighter. The future is full of promise."

"How our lives are changed!" said Cordelia. "And yet neither of us would willingly return to the old existence, I am sure. You have never regretted the step you took?"

"Not the step itself, but other things, perhaps," said Lamont carelessly. "Still, is not this inevitable?"

"Yes: I have learned that among other things. Do you find me much altered?"

"In some respects, yes," Lamont answered after a moment's consideration. "You are more mature, and I think your character has developed wonderfully. You have taken rapid strides onward, Cordelia; and I can see how suffering has served to accomplish this end. It has been the same with me also, to some extent. I never

discovered how much I had to learn until" — He checked himself abruptly. "It is apt to be the case with natures of a certain kind," he continued calmly. "They lie dormant, like the chrysalis in its shell, until some incident, trifling enough doubtless, causes them to spring forth, winged, and ready for flight. We can truthfully say we only then begin to live."

"Yes, you are right," said Cordelia. "But you appear unchanged to me. You are now just as you were long ago when I first knew you. Perhaps your face has lost a little of its healthy glow, and your eyes have become more thoughtful than they used to be; but that is all."

She looked at him earnestly, and Lamont felt the influence of the glance. It was unlike any she had ever given him in the early days of their friendship, and for an instant he felt his pulse bound with sudden joy. Was it possible that she cared for him? Was a new trial to be added to his already heavy burden? Fortunately, he did not know, that, since their parting, Cordelia had idealized him into something partaking of a divine rather than of an earthly character. He looked at her intently, — into her eyes filled with a happy light, and at the smile on her lips. No, it could not be. He would be spared this pain. She was glad to see him: he was still her friend, and the only thing remaining to her of happy days passed long ago. But this was all. He was sure of it, and thankful that it was so. Why, then, did he sigh, and become suddenly grave?

"You will let me come to see you occasionally, will you not?" he asked finally. "And, if I can be of assistance to the Professor in helping to discover some news of your aunt, it will give me pleasure."

"I shall always be glad to see you," she answered simply. "As for the other, I thank you; but I fear it would

be a useless undertaking. I have given up all hope of finding my aunt, or recovering my fortune. It does not matter much. I am earning my living honestly, and I have a pleasant home among friends. You have come now, and I need nothing more. I am satisfied."

There was a tenderness in her tone which struck him forcibly, and which he could not account for.

"There is wisdom in what you say, at all events," he said, smiling. "But I think the search should be carried out, nevertheless."

"So does the Professor; and he is still making inquiries, I believe. But, for my part, I have grown indifferent to the whole affair. I let the search go on, however, merely to please the Professor, who takes an immense interest in it. He is very sanguine, and has always looked upon me as a sort of victim."

"So you are," said Lamont, who was thinking of the Aldergroves. "But see," he added, "how late it is. The clock has already struck eleven, and I must leave you. Once more let me tell you how much this meeting has been to me. It has made me younger, I think, and brightened the present wonderfully." He rose, and, taking her hand in his, looked long and earnestly into her eyes. He fancied her voice trembled a little as she bade him good-night, but he was perhaps mistaken. When he had gone, however, she threw herself into a chair, and, burying her face in both hands, remained sitting thus for some time. Twelve strokes chimed forth from the gilt clock and the last spark in the grate died suddenly out. Yet Spring smiled on, holding up her flower-laden drapery; while the silver lamp at the far end of the room continued to shed its quivering yellow light on the floor.

At last Cordelia raised her head, glancing at the vacant chair opposite, as if half expecting to see Lamont still sitting there. Tears shone in her eyes, and now they began

to roll slowly down her cheeks. She rose impatiently, and wiped them away.

“Of what use is it to weep?” she asked herself. “He no longer cares. I am nothing to him but a painful recollection, while he” —

She went no farther. Her perplexed mind was filled by a single thought which had entered there, and become at once so deeply rooted that expulsion was impossible.

“What have I done, what have I done,” she cried brokenly, “that this of all things should happen to me?”

For a moment she appeared overcome by a wild despair. But in a little while she recovered herself, and with trembling fingers extinguished the lamp. The room became suddenly enveloped in darkness; but she groped her way to the door, and, opening it, let in a flood of light from the hall. There was silence throughout the house. All had doubtless retired for the night.

Cordelia went slowly up the staircase, the sombre folds of her black dress lightly sweeping the crimson carpet. Lamont had come again into her life, but under aspects how changed.

What would be the result, she wondered.

CHAPTER XXXI.

PERPLEXITY.

"I would I could adopt your will,
See with your eyes, and set my heart
Beating by yours, and drink my fill
At your soul's springs, — your part, my part,
In life, for good and ill."

ROBERT BROWNING.

"You were doubtless surprised to see Padre Lamont again," said the Professor to Cordelia, as the family sat at breakfast the next morning.

"Yes and no," she answered. "It was unexpected, of course. I was at a loss to imagine who my visitor could be; but, at the same time, it seemed natural to enter the room, and find him there."

"It must have been a pleasure as well as a surprise," said Mrs. Hoveden. "Yet," she added, looking fixedly at Cordelia, "you do not appear to be in your usual good spirits this morning. The meeting, I hope, called up no painful reminiscences."

"On the contrary," said Cordelia, flushing a little, "it has given me many pleasant things to think about." She smiled as if to enforce her statement, but it was clearly an effort to do so.

"You must not be sad, dear Miss Héricourt," cried Elfrida from the opposite side of the table. "After lessons I shall show you something to make you laugh. Mary

laughed this morning. Did you not hear her while you were dressing?"

"No, dear," said Cordelia, her eyes resting with fond interest upon the quaint little figure in its still quainter dress. "But you shall make me laugh if you like."

"The sun never looks sad," said Elfrida. "When he feels bad, he goes away altogether, and hides himself behind a big cloud where no one can see him." She shook her long light curls, laughing merrily.

"You are too childish for one of your age, Elfrida," said Mrs. Hoveden. "Miss Héricourt must make you more sedate."

"No: I shall not try to change her," replied Cordelia. "Let her be natural so long as she will. She will grow serious in time, — too soon, I fear. What should you like to be when you grow up, Elfrida?"

"I shall dance in the circus," said the child, with a roguish look at her governess. "I shall have a white gown, with a rose-colored bodice, and wear a wreath of flowers. The music will play; and I shall dance, — oh, how I shall dance! Will you come to see me, Miss Héricourt?"

"Surely," said Cordelia: "we will all come."

"Did you find your friend changed?" inquired the Professor, putting aside the paper he had been attentively reading.

"A little more thoughtful, perhaps, but otherwise the same. I did not remember that you and he had once met. I recall the circumstance now, however."

"He seems to be a man of exceptional ability, and great force of character. He renounced the priesthood on account of conscientious scruples, I believe."

Cordelia again changed color. "He was not fitted for the life," she said, evading a direct reply. "Once convinced of his mistake, he was not to be deterred from his

purpose of leaving the priesthood. His resolutions are never hastily formed ; but, when conceived to be right, they remain fixed and unalterable. Of course, it was a terrible blow to the whole Catholic community when his intention became known. I do not think the Bishop ever forgave him."

"I can well believe that," said the Professor, with a peculiar smile. "And you? How did you take it? You, as a Roman Catholic, must have been highly incensed also."

"Yes," said Cordelia with a sigh. "It seemed very dreadful to me. He came himself to tell me of it. It was just after my illness, when the fever had left me weak and irritable. The Superior of the convent, who knew all, refused to admit him to my presence. While they were deep in discussion, I happened to enter the room ; and he pleaded so earnestly for an interview, that I consented to grant him one, notwithstanding the Superior's entreaties to the contrary. I am sure she never forgot it, but I was not sorry for having acted as I did."

"He told you the whole story, I suppose?"

"Yes ; and I received it, I fear, in a very uncharitable spirit. I was younger then, and my religious ideas rather narrow."

"But you are a good Catholic still," said the Professor : "you go regularly to mass and to confession, do you not?"

"Yes, and I would not lose my faith for any thing in the world. Lamont is a good Catholic, too, in spite of what he did. I shall always regret his act, but it is not for me to judge him. Judgment of that sort should come from a higher source. Besides, he was a true friend to me. I confess that I forgot this for a while. The revelation he made to me filled me with horror ; but, upon reflection, I saw how wrong I was, and regretted my hasty words. I had no means of telling him so, however, as he left Santa

Fe almost immediately. I have never seen him since until last evening, and yet I have always felt that we should meet again."

Cordelia was conscious of an absence of frankness in thus speaking of her relations with Lamont, and the thought worried her. Her honest nature cried out against this partial withholding of the truth, but she felt powerless to remedy it. How could she say to these friends that Lamont had loved her, — that this very love had been instrumental in causing him to renounce his vows? Still less could she tell them of his firm determination never to make her his wife, and of the possibility of his love belonging now wholly to the past.

"I suppose there was great excitement in Santa Fe for a time," said the Professor musingly. "I fancy I can see the Mexicans showering invectives upon the poor man's head, and perhaps expressing their feelings even more forcibly."

"Yes," said Cordelia gravely. "You will hardly believe me when I say that the Superior and I met Lamont one morning at the entrance of the *plaza*, whither he had been driven by an infuriated mob, — by people who knew him only by the good work he had accomplished among them. It was a sad scene, — one that I shall never forget."

"Is it possible that such a thing really occurred?" exclaimed the Professor. "How did he bear it?"

"They had even resorted to personal violence," said Cordelia, her eyes glowing with indignation at the recollection. "But he retained his natural dignity, and spoke calmly to them. Indeed, nothing, I think, could ever make Lamont lose his dignity. He has an air of superiority that never leaves him, and which is very impressive. I admire him more every time I think of that experience and the lesson it taught."

"And you meet again now, for the first time since then,"

said Mrs. Hoveden. "How interesting! you have doubtless much in common."

"More now than formerly, perhaps," Cordelia answered. "I think association with him some years ago did much toward forming my character and opinions. A young girl who is thrown constantly with a stronger and maturer nature than her own is apt to imitate unconsciously. At all events, I feel more in sympathy with his ideas now than I did when I first knew him."

"A fine nature to be in sympathy with, I am sure," said the Professor. "He interests me greatly."

Cordelia colored, and for an instant a more animated expression came over her face.

"You like him very much, Miss Héricourt," said Elfrida, who, with arms crossed upon the table, had been listening attentively to the conversation. "I like him too; and, when he comes again, I shall put on my white gown with the blue ribbons, and dance for him. That would please him, would it not?"

"Very much, dear," said Cordelia, smiling at the child's happy face. "He is fond of pretty little girls."

Elfrida clapped her hands. "When will he come?" she cried, rising from the table, and shaking her soft, flaxen curls. "When will he come?"

"You annoy Miss Héricourt with your questions, Elfrida," said Mrs. Hoveden. "Pray, be quiet."

"But I must know," persisted Elfrida, "so that I can ask Mary to dress me in time. Tell me, Miss Héricourt, when will he come?"

"I do not know, dear," said Cordelia, rising also, and putting her arm about the child; "but I will let you know when he is here, and he shall not go until you have seen him. Will that do?"

"Yes, yes, that will do. I shall show him the new step I learned the other day. Do you think he will be pleased?"

She ran from the room without waiting for an answer ; and her merry, childish laugh came back to them from the floor above.

The Professor rose, and, folding his newspaper, made preparations to go to his college.

"Your friend spoke much of you and your family," he said to Cordelia. "He was altogether ignorant of what had occurred. Of course, he told you about our conversation."

"Yes: he was greatly astonished and shocked. He offered his assistance in making inquiries about my aunt, but I declined them. I have given up all hope," she added seriously.

"I have not," said the Professor, "nor do I intend to. It will be right in time, Miss Héricourt: mark my words." He smiled again in his peculiar way, and presently left the room.

"I never knew him to be so sanguine over any thing," said Mrs. Hoveden. "I cannot understand it."

"Nor I," Cordelia replied abstractedly. Her thoughts had reverted once more to Lamont, and the other's words were hardly appreciated. The knowledge which had come to her so suddenly the evening before seemed to place her in the midst of a new existence. But how cruel an existence it was! Here, indeed, were no broad, easy paths, — no glimpse of a bright future beyond. All she saw was a life of pain and hopelessness. She wished that Lamont had not come, — that he had left her in peaceful ignorance of the true state of her feelings. And yet this meeting had given her so intense a pleasure, that the mere recollection served to bring to her eyes a light not often seen therein.

She went away presently to give Elfrida her lessons, and throughout the day performed her duties in the usual manner. But something was lacking to her content, and in place of it was a vague feeling of unrest. Her thoughts

wandered involuntarily into a region of happy possibilities, returning finally from the ideal to the actual with an increase of sadness. She wondered whether such unfortunate experiences as had befallen her were incidental to every life. Was each face that crossed her path a mask? Were the varied personalities she met with but so many coverings for perplexed minds and troubled hearts? Was any one happy? Or, did all alike, the rich and the poor, the prosperous and the luckless, the learned and the ignorant, lack the one attribute, or more, perhaps, leading to enjoyment? But how could she, being alive, hope to escape sorrow? It is only the vain egotist who thinks to find in himself the remedy for every ill, or else the perfectly unselfish nature which finds its best reason for living in the contemplation of others. But these extremes are rare: the latter, indeed, may be said to belong to a future age. And Cordelia was only a girl, with a girl's sensitive feelings.

Could she have looked into Lamont's heart as she looked into her own, she would have had no cause, perhaps, for either sorrow or discomfort. But human beings are doomed to play at cross-purposes with each other forever. We are made up largely of pride and sensibility, and therefore can rarely speak the right word, or leave the wrong one unsaid. We are blind when we have greatest need of our eyes, and dumb when utterance alone can set us free.

In Cordelia's close observance of Lamont, she had thought to see merely a calm, pleasant interest, — friendship, possibly, of a lukewarm kind, — but nothing more, so far as she was concerned. In the old days she had considered him too demonstrative. Now, of course, the fancied change in his manner was due solely to her own altered feelings; but she naturally did not recognize this fact.

And so she waited patiently for his next visit with a heavy heart, gazing blankly before her, and trying to discover the twinkling of some friendly star in the gray shadows that rolled up before her.

CHAPTER XXXII.

PARTED.

“And truly it demands something godlike in him who has cast off the common motives of humanity, and has ventured to trust himself for a taskmaster.” — EMERSON.

AFTER this first strange meeting, Lamont came often to see Cordelia ; and, by degrees, the slight reserve which held them both under its sway vanished, and left them natural and unrestrained. It cannot be said that Cordelia was utterly unhappy after the knowledge of her love for Lamont had come to her. She never doubted the entire hopelessness of her passion ; but she was satisfied to accept the present gratefully, to fully enjoy Lamont's companionship, to receive his advice, and to look up to him as a being nobler and better than herself. She was not one to grow mournful over the impossibility to accomplish the impossible. In the beginning, overcome by disappointment, she had seen little in life worth living for ; but she had too healthy an organization to allow her higher nature to lie dormant for any length of time, and gradually she regained some of her former cheerfulness. It must not be supposed from this, that her feelings had become cold, or that Lamont's fancied change of sentiment had caused her affection to lose any of its force. She merely experienced the calmness which succeeds all excess of emotion, and which is particularly apt to distinguish naturally unemotional temperaments. The love which, through want

of satisfaction, loses its power of reasoning, belongs only to weak minds ; and Cordelia certainly was not weak. Of sentiment she had plenty, but there was nothing maudlin about it. It may, indeed, be questioned whether true sentiment does not bring forth the best qualities of a fine character, and lend it both strength and grace. Be this as it may, however, she soon recovered from the momentary shock her meeting with Lamont had called forth ; and it took its place in her recollection, together with regrets of various kinds.

As for Lamont, if he suspected what was passing in her mind, it was never made apparent. His conversations with Cordelia were sometimes almost formal, and he displayed no evidences of the love he had once professed. It would be difficult to fathom the precise feelings which possessed him. Perhaps his old notions of honesty, a trifle exaggerated, were still deeply rooted. But, in spite of this, any casual observer might have seen that his interest in Cordelia was no ordinary one. He seemed to gather as much delight from their meetings as she did ; and, although he rarely descended to personalities, the little he did say was marked by genuine feeling.

Cordelia often parted from him greatly puzzled. He was a man of varied moods, and seldom appeared twice under the same aspect. In this respect, he was much changed from the Lamont of the past ; and the characteristic daily became intensified. Sometimes he talked brilliantly upon many subjects, and, in the midst of a smile, became suddenly grave and silent, as if a sad recollection had chilled his fancy. Cordelia found him often incomprehensible, but at the same time they were congenial companions and steadfast friends. He would occasionally bring a book to her, and read from it aloud in his clear, sonorous tones ; while Cordelia, listening with half-closed eyes, imagined herself to be sitting once more among the

sombre shadows of the Mexican cathedral, where Lamont, clad in his gold-embroidered robes, had recited the mass. But other thoughts always intruded themselves upon these. Perhaps, as he read, little Elfrida, with streaming yellow locks, and daintily slippered feet, would come dancing into the room; and Cordelia's visions vanished.

Then Lamont would speak to the child in his earnest way, which, however, made slight impression upon her volatile spirits. It was only when he related some weird story coined from his imagination that she sometimes listened with wide-opened, astonished eyes, breaking into a laugh, and clapping her tiny hands when he had finished.

After the child had gone, leaving them once more alone, he would generally shake off his grave mood, and talk, for a time, with animation.

Winter had passed in the mean while, and spring was already advanced. The tree which stood before the Professor's house was thickly studded with long white blossoms; and, through the branches, pale sunbeams made their way into some of the rooms. There was a grass-plot before the drawing-room windows, in the middle of which bloomed a tall lilac-bush; and a few roses climbed over the iron railing which separated the little garden from the street.

It was a quiet part of the city wherein the Professor had chosen to live, although at the present day it nearly forms the very heart of the business centre: not far distant lay the Hudson River, gleaming in the sunshine during the day, and in the evening forming a bluish-gray line between the hills on the opposite bank and the city. Cordelia and Lamont sometimes walked down to the water's edge late in the afternoon, when the sky, suffused with sunset tints of scarlet, cast a ruddy reflection upon the river. The scene was quite animated there generally. Many people came and went, some laughing and talking

gayly ; and children amused themselves by throwing stones into the water, watching, with delight and wonder, the widening circles produced upon the rippling surface.

Lamont spoke often of Santa Fe, seeming to take pleasure in recalling various incidents relating to his life there ; and Cordelia would listen with interest. She never told him of the Superior's behavior, and that of the sisters, when it became known at the convent that no money was to be forthcoming for the new order, or any thing else. Lamont had, nevertheless, gathered a part of the truth from her evident unwillingness to discuss the matter, and had formed his own conclusions.

"It was a brave step to leave Our Lady of Guadalupe, and come East alone in search of your aunt," he said to her one day, as they sat together in the drawing-room. "Did the Superior offer no objection to your so doing?"

"Oh, no!" Cordelia answered: "she made no effort to prevent my going. I was of no use in the convent; and, since there was no means of instituting the order, why should I have remained? Besides, my duty was clear."

"Do you not think every thing has happened for the best, after all? For my part, I have never enjoyed life so thoroughly as since I met you here, Cordelia. It has been worth some sacrifices, and I am ready to make others for the sake of remaining as I am now. What is your opinion?"

He rarely spoke in this tone, and Cordelia looked up in some surprise to meet the smile on his lips.

"Surely," she said with a heightened color, "I have no reason for complaint. Of course, there are moments in every life when matters look dark, and even hopeless; but such moments cannot last. Nothing of that kind endures for long, and perhaps we are the better for having suffered. My meeting with you has given me much that I had lost all expectation of possessing. I have your companion-

ship, your sympathy, your friendship. Is it not a great deal?"

She glanced at him earnestly, and Lamont thought to perceive in the expression something that was not usual.

"How can I thank you for such words?" he exclaimed. "They are genuine, I know. We now understand each other perfectly, I think. There could be no distrust, no doubt, between us, could there, Cordelia?"

"No," she said sadly. "I think not, — nay, I am sure of it."

He looked at her with some curiosity. "There seems to be a regret underlying your very words of satisfaction," he said. "Am I right? If so, speak to me openly, and let me try to remove it."

"There is no regret," she answered. "I am apt to be serious when I talk to you, because you are so; and my manner is generally a reflection of your own. When you occasionally laugh, I am gay; and silent or reserved if you look at me thoughtfully, as you do now."

Lamont did not reply at once; but he rose, and walked to the window. His back was toward her; and for some time he remained standing thus, absorbed apparently in reflection. Of what was he thinking, she wondered? He was not looking into the street; for his head was bowed, and his eyes fixed upon the floor. The afternoon was quickly fading into twilight, and the forms passing in front of the house were indistinct and dark. When Lamont at last turned, and approached her, she could not observe his expression minutely, but something in his manner struck her at once.

"Cordelia," he said in a low tone, standing before her, "have you forgotten?" This was all; but she felt the blood rush suddenly to her face, and then ebb as quickly away, leaving her pale and trembling. She tried to answer, but for the moment speech refused to come.

"You have forgotten," he said a little unsteadily; "and I rejoice that it is so. But I—I have something to tell you."

The rapid change from his ordinary reserve to a tone of almost impassioned entreaty caused her to lose, for a moment, her self-control.

"It is not as you think," she said hastily, and with averted face. "I wish I could forget: I have long wished it."

"Surely you do not reproach yourself still," he said, mistaking her meaning. "What can I do to make you believe you acted as you should have done? You have nothing with which to upbraid yourself." He spoke a little bitterly.

Cordelia was silent, avoiding his glance, that he might not see what was written on her face.

"I have something to tell you," he repeated, — "something which can no longer be concealed. It is this, Cordelia. My love for you is as strong now as when I first told you of it. Nay, do not start. You have nothing to fear, believe me. I thought I had finally succeeded in crushing it out of my life until I met you again, and found it still here in my heart, filling it as it had never done before. I have seen you almost daily for several months, and what has been the result? You can guess it, I am sure. And now," he continued, stretching forth both hands with an eloquent gesture, "there is no alternative but to leave you as I left you once before. It is inevitable, and I have seen it coming ever since we spoke together here after our long separation. But, coward-like, I tried to avoid the contemplation of my duty, as once before I endeavored to escape from it. It will not, however, brook eternal concealment. I have tried to fancy my passion had resolved itself into warm friendship, and nothing more. But I cannot deceive either myself or you. I love

you, Cordelia, and I shall go from you. You must learn to do without me. It will not cost you much, perhaps ; but for me it is hard." His tone, though resolute, betrayed some emotion ; and he let his hands fall, with a movement of hopeless resignation.

"Ah!" she cried, turning her face suddenly toward him, "you do not know — you do not understand, if you leave me, how hard it will be for me also." Her cheeks became suffused with crimson, and she burst into a fit of convulsive weeping.

"Cordelia!" he exclaimed in unfeigned wonder, "do I comprehend you aright? Is it possible? Can it be that you love me?" He asked the question with trembling expectation, but no answer was forthcoming.

"Look up, Cordelia, and speak to me," he said presently. "If indeed you love me, I am at once the happiest and the most unfortunate of men. Tell me, is it so?" His eager voice grew more subdued.

"Yes," she answered faintly, not venturing to meet his gaze, "I do love you. But why do you call yourself unfortunate? Must I bring fresh misery to you as well as to myself?"

There was no reply for a moment. Lamont had thrown himself into a chair, and sat looking mutely at his clasped hands outstretched upon his knee. "What shall I do?" he said mechanically. "What can we do?"

"Do not think of me," said Cordelia, raising her pale, tear-stained face to his. "Think only of yourself, Paul. You know what is just and right. Be true to yourself."

"Shall I put my own feelings before yours?" he cried passionately. "It is a question of duty against duty now, Cordelia, and not of duty against inclination. Which should come first, — my duty to you, or my duty to myself?" He spoke the last words sadly.

"Your chief duty is to yourself," she said bravely.

"But oh! can you not fulfil the other equally well? Think, Paul, before you decide. Remember, the happiness of us both depends upon your choice."

He did not seem to hear her. "Have I not borne enough without this?" he exclaimed vehemently. "So long as I suffered alone, I could endure it passably well. But that you should give me your love, — a priceless gift, — and that I must fling it away without so much as letting it touch my heart for one brief instant, is almost more than I can bear. You think me weak, perhaps; but I wonder at my strength."

"But why, why must you do this?" she asked brokenly. "Once I did not love you, and you were right in leaving me; but to-day I do love you. Why, then, can we not take the happiness that is offered to us?"

"Can you know me and ask?" he cried. "My heart and my spirit are broken, I think; but I am still honest. My love is not for you, nor can yours be mine. My broken vows will ever stand between us, Cordelia; and, knowing this, what can we do but part?" There was a subdued anguish in his tone which displayed the effort his words cost him.

"Then, we are indeed to be pitied," she said slowly. "To stand thus with our hearts bared to each other, and feeling that nothing can ever unite us, is a trial such as we have never been called upon to endure. But O Paul! are you sure this is the right course to take? Have you considered well?" She put the question in scarcely audible tones.

"Ah! do not tempt me, Cordelia," he said mournfully. "I am weak and irresolute enough as it is. To lose you, now that you love me, I think is beyond my strength. And yet — and yet, what can I do?"

"But do you owe nothing to me?" she exclaimed. "Think again, I implore you. My love for you makes

me a part of yourself. Can it be your duty to cast me from you? You are a man with a career before you. I am a woman alone in the world, and I love you. What have I but you?"

"Forgive me, Cordelia," he said hastily, "if I have wounded you. But, indeed, I hardly know what I say. I have wrecked my own life and yours. I have destroyed your youth, and given you in place of it unending pain. Yet my own misery will perhaps help to atone for it."

"Hush!" she said gently. "You forget yourself indeed. Cannot our holy faith comfort us? Is it not our hope and consolation in misery?"

Lamont had risen suddenly, and thrown himself on his knees before her.

"By and by," he said in a low tone, "but not now — not now. Can you bear to look at me," he added, "degraded and unworthy as I am?"

"You are not degraded nor unworthy," she answered, extending her hand, and letting it rest on his head. "Your soul is the noblest I have ever known; and when the first shock of this grief — our grief — has passed, it will be yet nobler."

There was a momentary pause. The shadows lengthened, and the room became gradually enveloped in darkness. Lamont, kneeling before Cordelia, formed a black, irregular outline against her pale-gray dress.

"I never thought you would know," she said finally, looking at him with tear-dimmed eyes. "I fancied your love was a thing of the past, and that, in time, my own would be conquered by sheer force of will. But I was mistaken. It is there forever: it can never leave me, and I must bear my burden alone."

"Not alone!" he exclaimed, looking up to meet her glance. "No, not alone, Cordelia. Oh! why is every thing denied to us?" he continued passionately. "Are

we such unworthy objects that the best part of life must be withheld from us? What sin have I committed, except that of acting and speaking the truth? And you—who is purer, better, more entitled to all that can bring happiness? Is there no earthly reward for an endless struggle in the right course? Must we wait for another existence to reap the benefit of our toil here?"

"It is for you to decide, Paul," she said sadly. "Perhaps, by patient waiting, we may find our reward here. I wish it might be so, and I will pray to God to grant us this blessing. We are yet young."

"Young! I have had no youth," he cried. "There is none in store for me. Where is our youth, Cordelia,—mine and yours? Have we not just buried all that remained of it?"

"I think you are right," she said wearily. "We have buried it, and we shall never see it again." Her calmness suddenly deserted her. "If you will not accept my love, can we not, at least, be friends?" she cried, her tears breaking forth afresh. "Do not cast me entirely away."

He rose to his feet, and looked down upon her sorrowfully. "No, no," he said, "it cannot be, Cordelia. Do not put in my way that which I can never look upon or touch. Let me take your hand in mine; for I am quite calm again now, and presently I shall be able to bid you good-by." He was visibly making an effort to command his voice.

"Do you remember the old days in Santa Fe, before my trouble and yours came to us?" he asked gently. "Life then was full of promise. How different is it now! Even though our youth is gone, we have many years before us; and we must endure to the end. I wonder if you fully understand me,—if you can form any idea of the agony I suffer while I stand quietly here looking into your eyes."

"Ah!" interrupted Cordelia, clinging to his hand, which

was wet with her tears, "must it be forever? Is there no alternative,—no way of escape?"

"None," said Lamont firmly; "but try to be brave, Cordelia, lest I lose my self-control. You will never know what this parting has cost me." He drew nearer to her, and gazed long and searchingly into her face. Then releasing his hands from her clasp, he laid them gently upon her head. "May God bless you!" he said reverently. "May he guide you always, and enable you to bear your trial bravely! He has called me from you, Cordelia, and he will give you something in place of me."

His voice faltered; and he made an effort to speak again, but no sound was forthcoming. Cordelia raised her arms, and for an instant placed them about his neck despairingly. He drew her to him with sudden vehemence, and kissed her several times: then, disengaging himself from her clasp, he looked once more into her pale face, and left the room.

She realized that she had seen him for the last time; but she shed no tears now, nor did even a sigh escape her. She only sat motionless, with her hands pressed tightly against her heart.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A MEANS TO THE END.

“Children pick up words as pigeons peas,
And utter them again as God shall please.”

SUMMER was now at its height, and the pavement in front of the Professor's house was covered with the faded remains of blossoms which the feet of passers-by and the storms of rain and wind had changed from white to dull brown. Although the heat was often intense, the family rarely left the city for any length of time; for the Professor preferred his own home to every thing, and Mrs. Hoveden was unwilling to leave him. Sometimes, however, the two women, with little Elfrida, would go to the seashore for a day or two, returning to the deserted city refreshed and invigorated by the cool, bracing air, and enlivened by the glimpses of social life with which they had come in contact.

It made little difference to Cordelia whether she were in one place or another. Her duties occupied the greater part of her time, and her spare hours were spent with her books. She well knew how perfect a companion a book can be when the mind is discouraged and the heart oppressed, — a companion who never forcibly intrudes his views, but who is always ready at a moment's notice to reveal hidden stores of knowledge, offering strength and comfort with silent but expressive sympathy. A good

book is the open door leading to an ideal world, where we may retire and live for a while in perfect enjoyment. Here sorrow does not enter, nor is the shadow of a regret permitted for an instant to mar the surroundings. All is peace; and the vulgar cares of life are, in this realm, either quickly forgotten, or else deemed as naught.

The Professor and his wife had naturally been surprised at the sudden cessation of Lamont's visits. But, as Cordelia said nothing upon the subject, they wisely asked no questions. This portion of her life was one upon which she could not touch to any one. It was reserved for her moments of solitude and reflection; and, although its exceeding bitterness often made her long for a friend to whom she might fully confide the story, she was always glad, in her calmer moments, that she had not yielded to the impulse. Doubtless, the Hovedens inferred some of the truth, if not the whole; and they were willing to offer all the consolation that lay in their power. When Elfrida, with childlike curiosity, questioned her governess about Lamont, her mother rebuked her; but Cordelia's indifferent answer, imbued nevertheless with marked consciousness, had a significance of its own which was not lost upon the two older people.

"He must love her, and she evidently cares for him," said the Professor one day. "But, if so, where does the difficulty lie? What can stand between them? Not poverty certainly, for they are both above such a consideration as that. Do you remember, Maria, how white and distressed she looked after his last visit here?"

"Yes: it is very mysterious," answered Mrs. Hoveden. "We shall never know exactly what happened, I fear. Cordelia is extremely reserved, and the subject is one upon which I cannot question her. I am more than sorry for her. She has suffered greatly."

"Some people are born to suffer," said the Professor

emphatically, "just as others, with no brains to speak of, live like butterflies, enjoying every thing, sipping a little honey here, a little there,—but always honey. I wonder which is the preferable state? Is it better to think, and, consequently, feel and suffer; or to flit aimlessly about, unconscious that such things as thought and sensibility exist? Tell me what you know, and I will tell you what you feel. The world is full of butterflies, but they are ignorant and senseless animals. For my part, I would endure sorrow for the sake of brains and heart."

"So would I," said Mrs. Hoveden, smiling; "but, while you stand here discoursing so eloquently, the hands of the clock are moving steadily onward. It is ten o'clock, and you will be late at your laboratory."

"I must speak when inspired, or else not at all," said the Professor, laughing good-humoredly. They had finished breakfast some time ago, and Cordelia had gone up stairs with her pupil. "I suppose," added the Professor, "that I must take your advice, and go." He rose, and thrust his newspaper into the pocket of his linen coat, and, bidding his wife farewell, left the house.

Even at that early hour the air was very sultry; and those who were in the street had umbrellas over their heads, to protect them from the sun's scorching rays. As the Professor descended the steps, his attention was drawn to the figure of a little boy, who was walking non-chantly up and down on the opposite side of the way. He stopped short on seeing the Professor, and looked at him wistfully. Something in his expression instantly awakened the Professor's curiosity and interest; so he crossed the street, and approached the child.

"Are you in trouble, my little man?" he asked in a friendly tone. "Are you in search of anybody or any thing in particular?"

"No, thank you," replied the child, raising his large,

thoughtful eyes. "I am going nowhere. I have just finished breakfast at the baker's on the corner. I have money, you see." He put his hand into the pocket of his short trousers, and drew forth a handful of small change. "I don't know where I shall go now," he added. "I have only been here since last evening."

His calm, confidential manner struck the Professor with amazement. "Are you alone?" he inquired blankly. "Did you come here by yourself? You cannot be speaking the truth?"

"I do speak the truth," said the boy, flushing a little. "She said I did not, and locked me up. So I ran away, and I am not going back again as long as I live."

"Ran away!" exclaimed the Professor, somewhat puzzled. "Oh, this will never do! Where do you live? and who is *she*?"

"You would not understand if I told you," said the boy, with an unconscious imitation of Mrs. Fielding. "I was punished for telling the truth, and I ran away: that is all." He spoke almost sadly, and his eyes were downcast.

"But, my dear child, that was very wrong," said the Professor doubtfully. "From what place did you run away?"

"From Silverbridge."

"Silverbridge! Why, that is a long way off," said the Professor in amazement. "Your poor father and mother are doubtless in the greatest distress about you. I must see to this at once. Come with me, my boy."

"I have no father and no mother," said the child hastily. "I call Mrs. Fielding mother, but she is only my step-mother; and my father is dead. You are not going to send me back, are you, sir? Please do not." There was an earnest entreaty in his tone.

"At all events," said the Professor evasively, "you cannot be left to wander about the streets alone. What is your name?"

“Richard Fielding. Is that your house opposite?”

“Yes, and I am going to take you there for the present. Come, my little man, do not be afraid.” He took the boy’s hand, and led him across the street. Richard looked up at him with a sort of helpless inquiry.

“You will not send me back?” he asked again.

“Why, what will become of you if I do not?” said the Professor kindly. “You cannot roam about the city by yourself. Where did you intend to sleep to-night?”

“I do not know—anywhere. I staid in the baker’s shop last night. I might go back there, I suppose.”

The Professor gazed at him in silent wonder. Could that confident tone and independent manner belong to a child? How could so slight and youthful a form contain so much energy and determination? He felt scarcely equal to the task of talking to this boy who seemed so old. He noted, as they went up the steps of the house, that Richard’s face became suddenly suffused with crimson, while his large blue eyes sparkled with excitement.

“I would rather die than go back,” he burst forth vehemently. “She has always been unkind to me, and I hate her,—yes, I hate her!”

“Poor little fellow!” said the Professor gently. He entered his drawing-room as he spoke, and, bidding Richard be seated, went up-stairs in search of Mrs. Hoveden. He told her hurriedly, how he had found the boy in the street; expressing, at the same time, his intention to take him home as soon as possible.

“Yes, you must certainly do so,” said Mrs. Hoveden. “But let me see him and talk with him first.”

She went quickly down-stairs to the drawing-room, where Richard, with a large album on his knee, was looking at some photographs.

“My dear child,” she said kindly, “will you tell me what has happened, and how you come to be alone in

New York? Do not be afraid to speak." She sat down beside him, and placed her arm about his shoulders. He looked up in surprise, unaccustomed to such tenderness.

"I was punished unjustly," he said in a low tone. "She locked me up because she thought I told a lie, but I did not lie. I have never spoken any thing but the truth."

"Was it your mother, dear?" asked Mrs. Hoveden sympathetically.

"No, — my step-mother, Mrs. Fielding. She does not love me. I have no real mother." His voice became unsteady, and the large tears that stood in his eyes rolled down his cheeks.

"And you ran away for this?"

His firmness appeared to return all at once, as the question was put; and he raised his head proudly, brushing away the tears on his face. "Yes. I jumped from my bedroom window, and ran to the station. I had money with me, and I bought a ticket for New York. They refused to sell it to me at first; but I begged so hard, that finally they consented. The train was crowded, and no one noticed me. I did not know where to go when we reached the city; but I saw a baker's shop near by, and I went in to buy something, for I was hungry. I asked the woman there if I might stay all night. She said no at first, but, when she saw my money, told me I might remain if I liked. This morning I started out to walk. I was going nowhere — just wandering about, when I met the gentleman who brought me here. Perhaps" —

"But," interrupted Mrs. Hoveden, "this is dreadful. Do you know," she added to her husband, who had just entered the room, "this poor child slept in a baker's shop last night, and would have roamed about the streets all day, had you not met him? Tell me," she said, turning to Richard, "what you would have done when your money was spent."

"I do not know. I had not thought of it," he replied carelessly.

"He says his name is Richard Fielding," said the Professor. "I wonder if he can be the son of a Mr. Fielding who crossed the plains with me on that never-to-be-forgotten journey. Your father is dead, you say, Richard?"

"Yes: he died about two years ago. My sister Castaly crossed the plains with him once. She was quite little then, and our mother was still alive."

"Why, it must be the same!" cried the Professor. "Castaly! yes, that was the name of the little girl Mr. Fielding had with him. I remember her perfectly."

"How odd it is!" said Mrs. Hoveden. "Something happens constantly to remind you of that journey. I do not think, however, I have heard you mention the Fieldings."

"Probably not. You know I rarely speak of that time at all," said the Professor thoughtfully.

"I have heard Castaly mention having crossed the plains with papa," said Richard. "It was long ago, when I was a little fellow, only five years of age. Mamma and I remained at home. I think she died soon after they returned; and then we went abroad, where papa married again." He spoke with animation, having gained much confidence in the presence of the Professor and his wife.

"And the present Mrs. Fielding is unkind to you, is she?" inquired the Professor presently. "What does she do?"

"She locked me up for speaking the truth, and she appears to take pleasure in making me miserable," answered Richard, his despondency returning all at once at the recollection of his wrongs. "O sir! are you going to take me back?"

"I fear I must, my dear boy. I do not doubt that what

you say is quite true, and that you are unhappy with Mrs. Fielding; but it is, nevertheless, my duty to take you back again."

"It will be worse than ever," said Richard tremulously. "She will punish me again, and more severely."

"No, no: I will speak for you," said the Professor encouragingly. "You shall not be punished if I can help it. I will see Mrs. Fielding myself."

"Can you describe your home to me, Richard?" asked Mrs. Hoveden, hoping to divert the child's mind. "What is the name of the place?"

"The village is called Silverbridge, and it is near the Hudson River. It is not very far from here. Our home is called 'The Cedars.'"

"What a pretty name! Do you go to school there?"

"Not in summer, but I have a tutor during the winter. He is quite young, and knows a great deal."

At this moment the door opened gently, and Elfrida's blond head appeared in the opening. The smile which a moment before had crossed Richard's face at the mention of his tutor grew still brighter as he caught sight of the little girl, who, entering noiselessly, stood regarding him in mute wonder. Involuntarily he rose from his seat, and ran toward her with extended hand, his trouble apparently fading completely away.

"Come and speak to this little boy, Elfrida," said Mrs. Hoveden. "Would you not like to have him for a playmate?"

Elfrida broke forth into sudden laughter, and clapped her hands. "A playmate!" she cried. "Have you come to play with me? What is your name?"

"I cannot stay to play with you. I am to go back home with this gentleman," said Richard. "I am very sorry." He sighed, and cast an appealing glance at the Professor.

"Cheer up, my little man. It is not so bad, surely, as

to make you downcast. Some other time you shall come to play with my little Elfrida, who has no companion except her doll. Should you like that?"

"Yes," said Richard gravely; "that is, if she care to have me."

"Stay now: I want you to stay now!" exclaimed Elfrida. "No one ever plays with me, and I am tired of being alone. I like you," she added gently; "and, if you will stay, I will show you all my pretty toys. Come with me, come." She seized his hand, and was about to draw him from the room.

"No, Elfrida: he has already told you he cannot stay," said the Professor, with decision. "He must go home with me." He glanced, as he spoke, at his watch. "It is eleven o'clock," he said; "and I think we had better go at once. Are you ready to come with me, Richard, my boy?"

"If I must," said Richard, with hesitation. He held Elfrida's hand tightly clasped within his own, and his expressive eyes looked longingly into hers.

"Why did he come if he cannot stay?" she cried, bursting all at once into passionate sobs. "I want him to stay. He shall stay!" She ran to her mother, and, throwing both arms about her neck, wept bitterly.

"For shame, Elfrida! how can you be so foolish?" said Mrs. Hoveden reproachfully. "Richard cannot stay now. See, you grieve both him and me by behaving in so childish a manner."

Elfrida raised her head, and looked at the Professor and Richard, who had risen. "Go, go!" she cried, with flashing eyes. "I do not care." She turned away, bursting afresh into tears and sobs, and hiding her face on her mother's breast.

"You are an unreasonable child," said the Professor, half smiling, "and you are a true woman. Come," he

added, approaching her, and placing one hand upon her head, "will you not bid us good-by?"

She hesitated for a moment, but finally held out her small, delicate hand to Richard. "You will come again? Will you promise?" she asked. The anger had gone completely from her voice, but there were still tears in her eyes.

Richard, also greatly disappointed, could hardly repress his own. How different was this home from the one he had just left! What perfect happiness it would be to remain here, even for a short time, and enjoy the society of Elfrida, whose fantastic humor suggested to him the heroine of a fairy-tale, so quaint, so capricious, so ethereal was she, seemingly scarcely human! He bade her farewell in trembling tones, and followed the Professor to the door with a sigh of regret.

Elfrida, standing by her mother's side behind the open window, her blue eyes suffused with tears, appeared to him like a beautiful vision slowly fading from sight. He looked up at the Professor, who was plunged in reflections of a very different kind; and then he thought of Mrs. Fielding, wondering what her reception of them both would be.

XXXIV.

AN UNEXPECTED ENCOUNTER.

“ ‘ Il y a partout du bon,’ repliquait Candide. ‘ Cela se peut,’ disait Martin, ‘ mais je ne le connais pas.’ ”

VERY little conversation took place between the Professor and Richard during the ride to Silverbridge. The boy was naturally depressed at the idea of facing his step-mother after his recent escapade, for he knew the effect of his conduct upon her would not be an agreeable one. The Professor, on his part, was thinking of the peculiarity of his meeting with Mr. Fielding's son. The recollections associated with this gentleman were of a sombre character ; and as he recalled the details of the journey across the plains, and the incidents which had since occurred, he became more and more pre-occupied. He had purposely avoided speaking to Cordelia of Richard before leaving the house, and had laid strict injunctions upon his wife to be silent on the subject. For of what avail would it be to bring up before the girl painful reminiscences which could lead to nothing ?

By and by, hoping to divert his mind somewhat, he drew a book from his pocket, and handed, at the same time, an illustrated paper to Richard. Both prepared themselves to read ; but neither was able, apparently, to fix his thoughts upon the literary matter before him. Try as he would,

Richard could see nothing in the pictures except distorted images of Mrs. Fielding, whose Medusa-like head seemed to shake ominously. Unconsciously the Professor followed the same train of thought. His book lay unopened on his lap; and, with eyes fixed dreamily upon the green meadows past which the cars were rapidly moving, he gave himself up to the contemplation of Mrs. Fielding's probable appearance. Was she really a hard-featured, harsh-voiced creature, such as Richard had described? or was she merely one whose uprightness and integrity caused her to maintain, at all costs, a proper amount of discipline in her family? And Castaly, the little girl who had formed one of that memorable party! Had she any distinct recollection of it, he asked himself? or was the impression then made too slight to be retained? He forbore to question Richard about his sister, preferring to see and judge for himself; and, as the train sped onward, he longed impatiently for his destined stopping-place, notwithstanding his companion's evident uneasiness.

"Here we are at last," he said, with an effort to be cheerful, as a little later the station of Silverbridge came in sight. "Now be brave, my boy, and all will go well."

Richard did not seem impressed by this encouragement. "Indeed, I am not frightened, sir," he said, trying to shake off his despondency. "I am quite ready to go home."

"You are a fine little fellow," said the Professor approvingly, looking over his spectacles at the child. "That is the right way to speak. Now show me the way to your place. Shall we take a cab, or walk?"

"A cab, I think," said Richard, to whom, in his present state of mind, every moment of delay was torture. "I know where to get one that will take us up in ten minutes."

"Lead the way, and I will follow," said the Professor. "I suppose any of these will do," he added, pointing to a row of carriages that stood in waiting by the station.

"Yes," said Richard. "Get into this one, if you please, sir." He opened the door of the carriage with an air of authority, which, had the circumstances been different, would have brought a smile to the other's lips. "Go to 'The Cedars,'" he continued to the driver.

They entered the rather dilapidated vehicle, and were soon rolling over the uneven road that formed the principal village street.

"It will soon be over now," said Richard calmly, and half to himself.

"You take it too much to heart," said the Professor pleasantly. "No harm shall come to you while I am here."

"Yes; but you will not always be here," said the boy: "and—and you do not know Mrs. Fielding." He uttered the last words mournfully. "There is the house," he added, pointing through the window to a large building embedded in trees. "You see, we have but a little way to go."

"A fine place, indeed," said the Professor, following with his eye the direction indicated. "You ought to be happy in such a home."

The boy made no reply. They had entered the grounds through the heavy iron gates now, and he was nerving himself to meet his step-mother. When the carriage drew up before the door, he let the Professor get out first, and ring the bell.

It was just one o'clock; but, in comparison with the hot air of the city they had just left, the atmosphere here seemed fresh and cool. The perfectly kept lawns about the house were of a brilliant emerald hue, upon which innumerable flower-beds formed masses of gorgeous color. Far away, beyond an angle of the building, stretched long greenhouses, filled, doubtless, with other rare and beautiful plants. As the Professor turned from the contemplation of these surroundings to enter with Richard the dim, cool

hall, with its stained-glass windows, its floor of Venetian tiles, and its staircase of carved stone, he felt instinctively that unbounded wealth reigned here. The old butler, who admitted them, started a little, and was unable to suppress the exclamation that rose to his lips.

"And is it, indeed, yourself, Master Richard?" he said, in a tone of delight. "Why, Mrs. Fielding has been hunting the place over for ye; and, as for Miss Castaly, her heart is just broken."

"But I'm here, James, safe and sound, you see," replied Richard earnestly, as the old servant, with a curious glance at the Professor, threw open the massive oaken doors of the drawing-room. "Go tell Mrs. Fielding to come down. You need not say who is here, but let her know a gentleman wishes to speak with her."

James nodded, and silently left the room to summon his mistress. Richard went to one of the windows, and began to drum nervously on the pane. "Don't forget your promise, sir," he said presently.

"Eh! what?" exclaimed the Professor absently. He was sitting in an antique chair of carved ebony, and, lost in revery, had almost forgotten the boy's presence. "No, of course I shall not forget," he added. "You may rely on me to do all in my power for you."

He sank back again in his chair, and let his eyes wander from one beautiful object to another. Now they rested in admiration upon a marble statue, standing in dazzling naked loveliness in the full morning light, against the sombre hangings of the walls: then they fell restfully upon a piece of wonderful wood-carving, or a Chinese porcelain, many tinted, and graceful in outline. The room was furnished with an elegant simplicity, every beautiful object helping to form a harmonious whole. He wondered whose taste had superintended the arrangement of these admirable surroundings. Not Mrs. Fielding's,

certainly ; for how could so morose and severe a nature as hers comprehend the force of artistic beauty, or feel the influence produced by softly blended colors ?

"She is coming !" exclaimed Richard, suddenly interrupting the Professor's meditation. "I hear her dress trailing on the stairs." He ran forward, as the Professor rose from his chair in anticipation of the lady's entrance. The bright sunlight streaming in through the window fell full upon her face, as she came into the room with her stiff, dignified bearing, her hands folded, and her lips compressed into an expectant smile. The Professor advanced a step, and then stopped short with an exclamation and a gesture of horror ; while Mrs. Fielding, observing his manner, drew back a little, and regarded him curiously. His back was to the light, and his features consequently somewhat obscure to her near-sighted eyes.

His face was blanched to a deadly pallor ; and he opened his mouth to address her, but no sound was forthcoming. Poor Richard, his eyes filled with tears, clung to his arm as if imploring him to say something before that other voice, cold and severe, should strike his ear. But the Professor, gazing at Mrs. Fielding with an expression of alarmed incredulity, was silent.

"Ah, Richard ! it is you, I see," she said, coming forward to where they both stood, not a muscle of her face changing. "I suppose I am indebted to this gentleman for bringing you back. May I ask where you have been since yesterday ?" She appeared to take no notice of the Professor's look, which, as her hard, monotonous tone made itself heard, changed suddenly into one of quick, indefinable relief. He shook off Richard's clinging grasp, forgetting completely the errand that had brought him there, and, advancing a step, stood face to face with Mrs. Fielding.

"At last !" he said under his breath. "At last !" He

measured her from head to foot with keen scrutiny. "So," he added calmly, "you have been here all the while, within a stone's-throw, while we have been searching the world over for you. It is ludicrous."

Mrs. Fielding opened her eyes a trifle wider, and changed color as she encountered the Professor's gaze; but she held her ground admirably.

"Really," she said, turning to her step-son, "this is a very extraordinary person who has brought you home, Richard. Where did he find you? or, rather, where did you find him?" Her lips were pale, and her voice a little unsteady; but no other sign gave evidence of her agitation.

"You know me well enough," exclaimed the Professor with scorn. "You may pretend to forget me; but at all events I remember you, Mrs. Aldergrove. Do you know that I have sought you for years? Now, having found you, you shall hear me."

"Mrs. Aldergrove!" she exclaimed with well-feigned amazement. "Oh, I see! you mistake me for that lady. Such errors are common. If, however, you seek Mrs. Aldergrove, I can give you no information; as she has been dead for some time."

"Ay, so you said, — you and your daughter Margaret," said the Professor bitterly. "But we have not been idle since that accident happened in the stage-coach. Good God, woman!" he exclaimed vehemently, "did you think to carry out your fiendish plans with no fear of detection? What did you do to Miss Héricourt? Where is the money that belongs to Cordelia? Answer me."

Mrs. Fielding shrugged her shoulders a little. "I think I recall your face now," she said quietly. "You are Professor Hoveden, are you not?"

He did not reply, but began to pace the floor with hasty strides, his hands clasped behind his back; while Richard, pale and terrified at the peculiar turn of affairs, shrank

into a corner, whence he regarded his step-mother and her accuser with mute dismay.

"Having taken that sad and memorable journey in our company," continued Mrs. Fielding, "I am amazed to find that you do not recall the circumstances pertaining to it as they really occurred. Your language is hardly becoming to one who considers himself a gentleman, and I must beg to inform you that I am unaccustomed to being insulted under my own roof. What you mean, I am at a loss to imagine; and I will not lower myself by asking you for an explanation. But if, in the midst of your present excitement, you are able to reflect seriously for a moment, you will recollect the fact that Mrs. Aldergrove was unfortunately lost on the plains, and that I, then Miss Anastasia Héricourt, with my niece Cordelia, travelled alone subsequently. It is not necessary for me, however, to mention these details," she added stiffly. "Your behavior, which is as enigmatical as it is disagreeable, does not entitle you to remain an instant longer in this house. But I am above resenting your words as I might do. Come with me, Richard. I shall not remain here to discover how you fell into the hands of this person. You shall tell me the story yourself. Sir, I bid you good-morning."

She held out her hand to Richard, who approached her hesitatingly, casting, at the same time, a look of surprise and mortification at the Professor.

"No!" cried the latter, springing forward, "you shall not go until you have heard me. Do you think I am deceived by your words? Have I no comprehension — no eyes? Call yourself Miss Héricourt to the world if you will, but not to me — not to me."

"I fail to see wherein the matter interests you," she said, moving toward the door with Richard's hand clasped in hers. Her manner betrayed indifference, but a sudden change overcame her when the Professor spoke again.

"I will tell you wherein it interests me," he said with emphasis. "Do not fear that aught will remain unsaid which for so many long years I have been preparing my lips to utter, that your ears might hear, and your mind comprehend. Do you know where Cordelia Héricourt is?" he added, coming close behind her, and speaking in a lowered tone. "Has it never struck you she might make some effort to find you out? It is true that she is poor, but she is not friendless. Ah! you start now, Mrs. Fielding, and you do well to show at last some trace of sensibility. Listen to the rest. Cordelia Héricourt lives with me, — she whom your daughter Margaret has personated for so long, — whom you have both so unmercifully robbed, leaving her an outcast upon the world, that you might enjoy this luxury. But I have sworn that justice shall be done her, and I will keep my word."

"Oh! this is too absurd: you are a madman," said Mrs. Fielding, with a harsh laugh. She turned, and faced the Professor, her pale lips tightly compressed again. "Cordelia Héricourt in your house!" she continued finally. "Why, there is only one Cordelia Héricourt. Look, there she comes now." She pointed with one finger through the open window. Margaret, utterly unconscious of the strange scene enacting in the drawing-room, was walking slowly along the gravel-path that led to the house. The Professor, breathless with excitement, watched her approach.

"I do not care what you say. What are your words in comparison with the facts I know to be true?" he said. "Call your daughter here. I remember her as well as I do you. No," he added, "do not trouble yourself. She is coming in, I see, of her own accord."

Margaret ascended the vine-covered steps of the veranda, and, a moment later, stood beside the window, from which the Professor had stepped aside to let her pass. As

she caught sight of her mother, standing upright, with a fixed and pallid countenance, a look of alarm swept over her placid features. She entered the room quickly, where the Professor, with folded arms, gazed at her with determined scrutiny. Then she cast a hasty glance beyond both these stern, silent figures, and beheld Richard, who had escaped from his step-mother's side, and now stood looking from one to the other in childish terror. Margaret's quick perception instantly told her that something was amiss, but her self-possession did not fail her in this trying moment.

"Is that you, Richard?" she asked in surprise, taking no notice of the Professor's presence, or Mrs. Fielding's white, agitated face. "Why, where have you been? and how did you get home? Do you know what trouble you have caused, disobedient boy?"

"We are indebted to this gentleman for his return," said Mrs. Fielding with icy composure. "It is not the first time we have seen him, unfortunately. Do you recall him, Cordelia?"

"Her memory is, perhaps, even better than yours," broke in the Professor ironically. "Do you remember me, Miss Aldergrove?"

Margaret started, but recovered herself instantly.

"That is not my name," she said coldly. "But it does not matter. I recollect you perfectly. You were in the stage-coach with us when we travelled from Santa Fe some years ago. Have you and Mrs. Fielding been renewing the pleasant associations of the journey?" Her tone was a mixture of indifference and rudeness. The Professor's face flushed scarlet.

"I called you Miss Aldergrove, because it is your name," he said sternly. "And this lady, formerly Mrs. Aldergrove, is your mother. Let me congratulate you both upon the manner in which you have, for so long, imposed

upon the public. This house is indeed beautiful. You are surrounded by every luxury the heart can desire. Perhaps, too, your consciences are at rest; for people such as you are not often troubled by any thing so vulgar as remorse. I doubt even if your minds ever dwell an instant upon the poor girl whom you have so vilely cheated, and who for years has been forced to earn her bread. You smile, Miss Aldergrove, but soon it will be otherwise. This fortune, which you and your mother enjoy, belongs, not to you, but to Cordelia Héricourt; and, in order to obtain it, you committed a crime. Tell me," he cried excitedly, "what did you do to old Miss Héricourt? Ah! now I see the same look on your face which it bore when it was discovered that a lady of our party had been lost on the plain. And you, too, Mrs. Fielding, why do you grow still paler? It is useless to cling so to your daughter, for she cannot help you. Do you not see she is more frightened even than you are?" He spoke contemptuously. The two women looked at each other, white and terrified. Margaret was the first to regain her composure.

"What do you mean?" she cried hoarsely. "How dare you come into our house to insult us? Leave it, — leave it at once." Her voice trembled with passion or weakness, it was difficult to determine which.

"He must be mad," said Mrs. Fielding, in a dry, choked voice. "He does not know what he says." Her glance wandered to Richard, who, filled with awe and dismay, was crouching in a large arm-chair, looking with startled eyes upon each one of the trio in turn. "Go away!" she exclaimed, addressing him angrily. "This is no place for you. Do you not hear me?" she added, as the child did not move.

"Stop!" cried the Professor, with a quick gesture. "Go, Richard, if your step-mother wishes it. Your presence here is certainly not desirable. But if your sister,

Castaly, is at home, bid her come here at once. I wish to ask her some questions."

"Castaly!" exclaimed Margaret, darting forward to the boy's side. "No, no! not Castaly!" She lost all control of herself for a moment, and appeared about to faint. "It is not fit that she should be here," she added presently, speaking more calmly. "You shall not see her, Professor Hoveden."

"I understand," he said, with quiet disdain. "Miss Castaly, perhaps, knows something which you do not wish repeated in my presence. Well, have it so if you like. She will be forced to appear, however, when the affair is taken into court. A delay of a few days will not matter much."

"Into court!" exclaimed Mrs. Fielding. "Indeed!" She spoke sarcastically, but her face was still pale and immovable.

"Pray, who will accuse us? and of what can we be accused?" asked Margaret, throwing back her head with proud scorn. "What have we to fear in any case? From your language I infer that you think we are not the Héricourts. Well, think so if you will." She left Richard's side, and, approaching Mrs. Fielding, placed one arm about her. "The terrible words of this man have upset you, and you are agitated, dear aunt," she said. "But he cannot harm us, nor can any one."

"So you suppose now, perhaps," said the Professor. "But Cordelia Héricourt and I will not be silent concerning what we know. How long we have waited for this, — how long!" he added in a low tone.

"There is but one Cordelia Héricourt," said Margaret haughtily. "She stands before you."

"Then, you would like me to believe that the young lady who for years has lived in my house is Miss Aldergrove!" said the Professor impatiently. "Fortunately, we know

better. Why, what is the matter?" he asked, noting a sudden look of alarm cross her face. "Did you imagine Cordelia Héricourt would bury herself, and remain silent in regard to the robbery perpetrated upon her? No, Miss Aldergrove, it is not so. For years I have sought you and your mother for that girl's sake, knowing well the whole terrible story. Who would have thought that child yonder could unwittingly have led me to the desired end?"

"We have borne this too long," said Margaret faintly. "We should not have permitted this man to stay for a moment beneath our roof. I shall ring the bell, sir, that you may be shown out without delay. How manly and admirable it is to come here to insult helpless women! But," she added, "I doubt not that the girl you call Cordelia Héricourt is more to blame than you. She always envied our good fortune, and her character is such that she would not hesitate to be dishonorable in order to serve her own ends." She pulled the bell violently. "Now, sir, you may go," she said.

"I am ready to go," replied the Professor calmly. "Your effrontery does not surprise me in the least. But we shall see later which of us wins. I have the honor, ladies, to bid you good-morning." He bowed with sarcastic deference, and left the room, followed by little Richard, who clung to his hand.

"O sir!" he exclaimed, "what has happened? and why did you speak so to Mrs. Fielding and Cordelia? You forgot your promise too, but perhaps it does not matter now."

"I am afraid I did, my poor little fellow," said the Professor, laying his hand on the child's head. "But, as you say, it does not matter, perhaps. Mrs. Fielding has something else to occupy her at present."

"You did not say that you knew her. Why did you not tell me?" asked Richard.

"I knew her long ago, but she was not Mrs. Fielding then," said the Professor. "Poor little fellow!" he said again, after a pause, looking down at the boy's questioning face. "I must go away now, Richard; but I shall see you again before long. Run into the garden and play, until you forget what has just passed."

"I will find Castaly. She is writing by the lake, very likely. How glad she will be that I have come back!"

The Professor nodded, and stepped into the carriage, that was still waiting before the door; while Richard, after one wistful glance at his countenance, turned away, and ran across the lawn in the direction of the pavilion.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A PIECE OF STARTLING INTELLIGENCE.

“Let a man contend to the uttermost
For his life's set prize, be it what it will.”

WHEN the Professor returned to the city that afternoon, he was very much perplexed. Apart from the unlooked-for meeting with Margaret and her mother, which truly was enough to fill his mind with reflections of an unusual kind, there was something else to occupy him. Cordelia must be told of what had happened; and it would be no agreeable nor easy task to shatter at once her firm belief in her aunt's existence, and impart the knowledge of her cousin's treachery, and his own rather deceitful behavior. To acquit himself properly of this delicate undertaking was something that required much consideration.

As he walked along the street toward home in the waning afternoon light, that began to cast broad shadows here and there, he wondered in what way he should set about the duty he was to perform. He began with some nervousness to search his mind for expressions suitable to the subject, and in so doing he became hopelessly bewildered. The heat of the day, and his recent exciting interview, did not serve to help him much. He had no intention of shocking Cordelia by any sudden outburst, for he recognized the propriety of a careful and skilfully

managed discourse which would cause light to dawn upon the matter in a way that could be defined as eminently agreeable. His delight at having found the Aldergroves so unexpectedly, threw, for a time, his indignation into the background. His surprise, his horror, and part of his triumph, had spent themselves in the outburst of feeling lavished upon the two women, and had now given way to a calm, self-satisfied mood. This was surely pardonable, even in a man of the Professor's dignified character; and the pleasure he experienced, and which it is said all those feel who, after a long season of waiting, find their hopes suddenly realized, was but natural. Since he had known Cordelia, it had been the dream of his life to discover the hiding-place of her cousins. In his heated fancy, he had imagined it to be now here, now there,—everywhere, in fact, except in the place which accident had revealed to him. His usual close observation had caused him to note, not only the looks of Mrs. Fielding and Margaret, but their voices and their manner, changing from terror to defiance. Defiance! What was it to him? Had he not Miss Héricourt's handkerchief stowed carefully away in the old cabinet in his drawing-room? And then, there was Lamont, who had known the family so well, that he could not fail to identify them. What a victory it would be! What a relief to Cordelia, whose unfortunate position had lain so heavily upon his heart!

When he reached his house, a cool breeze was coming up from the river; and the street was gilded with the sun's rays, which had lost their heat, and had a reddish tinge. Beside the open window, which was shaded by the wide-spreading branches of the chestnut-tree on the pavement, Cordelia sat reading. She saw the Professor approach, and looked up to greet him with a smile, going herself to draw the bolt of the street-door, that he might enter without delay.

"Back so soon!" she said. "And our little runaway? Did you deliver him safely, poor child, into his step-mother's hands? I heard all about it from Elfrida, whose heart was almost broken at thus losing a possible companion and playmate. But what is the matter, Professor? You look pale and worried, although you smile. Has any thing happened?"

"Yes, Miss Héricourt," he replied. "But do not be alarmed. I will tell you about it presently. Are you prepared to hear a story which in some respects resembles those you read aloud to Elfrida from her book of fairy-tales, and in which the good genius presiding over virtue makes every thing occur just as it should?"

"Is it — can it be possible that you have news of my aunt?" she asked quickly, her color coming, and then fading away again, leaving her very pale. "Is that it, Professor?"

"You shall hear presently," he replied. "Where is Mrs. Hoveden?"

"In the drawing-room. Shall we go to her?"

"By all means. She must hear what I have to say as well as you. Be patient for a moment, dear Miss Cordelia." He smiled encouragingly; and they entered the drawing-room, where Mrs. Hoveden was engaged with some intricate fancy-work.

"Well, Maria, I have some startling news for you both," said the Professor, throwing himself into a chair, and wiping the moisture from his face. "That is," he added hastily, recognizing the fact that this was not the way he had intended to begin, — "that is, something very extraordinary happened to me to-day."

"No accident, I hope," said Mrs. Hoveden, letting her work fall into her lap. "You took the child safely home, did you not? Poor little fellow! My heart ached for him. But let us hear your story, whatever it may be."

"It is a long one," said the Professor; "and I suppose I must begin at the beginning. It concerns you, Miss Héricourt. No, no, there is nothing to turn pale about. The news I bring you is, on the whole, good news."

"You have learned something of my aunt, I am sure!" exclaimed Cordelia. "Pray, tell me at once what it is." A sudden light came into her eyes, and the slender fingers clasping her book trembled a little.

"My intelligence is not of the kind you expect," said the Professor. "But never mind. Did it ever occur to you," he added, going straight to the point, "that your cousins, the Aldergroves, might have played you false, and so arranged matters that the money belonging to you and Miss Héricourt should fall into their own hands?" He looked narrowly at her as he slowly asked the question.

"Why, no!" answered Cordelia: "how, indeed, could such a possibility occur to me, when Mrs. Aldergrove is dead, apart from the fact that my aunt may be so likewise? I did think once, long ago, that my cousin Margaret might have personated me in order to obtain the money, and afterwards have so influenced my aunt as to induce her to keep the matter secret. But, upon reflection, the idea seemed absurd."

"Not so impossible as you think, nor so absurd," said the Professor dryly. "Suppose I could prove to you that the lady lost upon the plains was not Mrs. Aldergrove at all, but your aunt, Miss Anastasia Héricourt!" He bent forward, and regarded her earnestly.

"Not Mrs. Aldergrove!" cried Cordelia, starting up. "Not Mrs. Aldergrove! Oh, you must be mistaken!" She ceased speaking abruptly, and the Professor saw her breast heave with excitement. Mrs. Hoveden, with ever-ready sympathy, made a motion to draw the girl toward her; but, at a sign from her husband, she silently leaned back again in her chair.

While Cordelia was standing thus, the Professor quietly rose, and unlocked the drawer of the ebony cabinet.

"See," he said, coming toward her. "I have something here. Do you recognize it?"

Cordelia had recovered by this time from the strange effect produced by his words. She sat down again, and passed her fingers mechanically over the handkerchief.

"It is my aunt's," she said presently, speaking in a calm tone. "Have you had it there all the while? Why did you never let me see it?"

"I have a confession to make, Miss Héricourt," said the Professor after a pause, glancing apologetically at his wife. "The facts of this story have been known to me for some time, — ever since I became acquainted with you. But, as the Aldergroves had apparently disappeared from the face of the earth, I saw no reason to divulge either my knowledge or my suspicions. That handkerchief was picked up by me on the plain when we drove back to the place where the lady must have been lost. To me it proves conclusively that it was Miss Héricourt who fell out, and not Mrs. Aldergrove. Add to this, that the other ladies called themselves the Héricourts, and that the putting your aunt out of the way would be the only means by which they could obtain the fortune. Do you remember the letter I sent you? The name upon it was owing to no mistake of mine. I was told by the person representing herself to be Miss Héricourt to write to Miss Aldergrove, and I did as requested; although at the time of the accident, and even before then, I suspected something was wrong. When I met you here, and heard your story, the whole thing was as clear as possible: but I said nothing in regard to my thoughts, for I saw it would be of no use to do so; and I am a man who troubles himself little about what is unnecessary. I put the handkerchief away in that drawer; and, while you have supposed me

engaged in looking for Miss Héricourt, I have really been trying to find the Aldergroves. You know that the search has been considered a hopeless one, and the subject is rarely mentioned between us any longer. But I have never doubted that the day would come when I should stand face to face with the women who robbed you, and committed a crime that they might do so the more easily. Miss Cordelia, the day has come at last. This morning I saw Mrs. Aldergrove and her daughter Margaret."

He spoke calmly, exhibiting none of the emotion which suddenly overpowered Cordelia.

"You saw them!" she exclaimed. "Mrs. Aldergrove and Margaret! O Professor! are you quite sure?" Her breath came and went quickly, and her eyes sparkled with animation.

"Sure?" said the Professor. "Yes, I am quite sure. Mrs. Fielding, the step-mother of little Richard, who appealed so strongly to our sympathies this morning, is the former Mrs. Aldergrove; and the young lady, who lives with her under the name of Cordelia Héricourt, is your cousin Margaret."

"Cordelia Héricourt, — Cordelia," repeated the girl, as if she failed to comprehend the full meaning of his words. "Ah!" she cried suddenly, her pale face becoming suffused with color. "Does she dare to call herself that!" Her eyes flashed with anger, and her slight form trembled violently. "They always hated me. I see it all now. I have been a fool not to suspect them sooner." She spoke brokenly, and the Professor watched her with something like admiration.

"My dear," said Mrs. Hoveden gently, "these people indeed merit no mercy at your hands. But remember that they are defenceless now, while you are strong."

"I do not care," cried Cordelia. "Why should I be

merciful to them? I shall show them no mercy." Her passion vented itself in a burst of tears, and for a few moments she wept convulsively. "The excitement has been too much for me," she said presently, drying her eyes, and making an effort to regain her composure. "I do not often give way in such a manner, but it seems terrible to think such a discovery as this should be made. I suffer from the indignity to which I have been subjected, and I am overpowered by my cousins' treachery. What harm did I ever do them, I wonder? And my poor aunt too? What has become of her? Doubtless she is dead,—murdered in cold blood by these fiends in human shape."

"Oh, no! not that exactly," said the Professor. "A fall from a stage could not kill her. The Indians probably captured her."

Cordelia had bowed her head upon both hands, and did not speak for some time.

"How did these people receive you?" she asked quietly, having completely mastered her emotion. "Did they recognize you, and seem frightened? What did you say to them? Tell me, too, if they acknowledged their guilt."

"Acknowledge it!" exclaimed the Professor. "I fear you are not so familiar with the characters of your cousins as I am. At first they appeared really terrified, for I lost no time in telling them plainly of what I accused them. But, gradually gathering the strength and self-reliance for which I presume they are both noted, they defied me openly, declaring themselves to be the veritable Héricourts, and denouncing you as Miss Aldergrove, the wicked cousin who wishes to deprive them of their rights. I have only one thing with which to reproach myself," added the Professor; "and that is, my stopping to talk to them at all. It was undignified, to say the least: but, meeting them unexpectedly in that way, my feelings overcame me; and I made them plainly understand what I

thought of them. It was wrong, though, I acknowledge. I should have sent Burton to have it out with them. Yet it was an intense satisfaction to me. I feel better now than I have done for years. What they said need not intimidate us in the least, and I am rather pleased than otherwise at the ground they have taken. It will make our victory double."

"Is there no limit to their baseness?" cried Cordelia. "Will they persist even now in their treachery? Surely, they cannot do so!"

"They will make the attempt," said the Professor, with an easy smile. "But do not fear that any thing will come of it. Here is the handkerchief to begin with; and Lamont can identify them as the Aldergroves, apart from the story I myself have to tell."

Cordelia started at the mention of Lamont's name, which had not been uttered since his last visit to the Professor's.

"You told him all, then?" she asked. "If he can help us, he will do so gladly," she added confidently.

"To tell the truth," said the Professor, "I sent for him that evening solely to discover what he knew about the Aldergroves, and your relations with them. Forgive me for having concealed this from you. Did you not, however, guess our business?"

"I thought it might perhaps have something to do with my aunt; and, when he said he knew my story, I was, of course, convinced that you had talked of it together. I did not suppose your conversation could lead to any thing, so I asked no questions. Besides, you know, I am seldom curious."

"Less so than any woman I know, except, of course, you, Maria," said the Professor, nodding toward his wife.

"Why did you tell me nothing about all this?" asked Mrs. Hoveden in a slightly hurt tone. "I can understand

why you withheld the truth from Cordelia, but with me it is different. Do I not deserve all your confidence?"

The Professor smiled. "There are some things," he said, "which a man bears better alone. Suspicion is one of them. Is not one troubled mind enough for a household? Why should I burden you with cares you are powerless to relieve?"

"Still," persisted Mrs. Hoveden, "you would have done better to tell me." Her womanly dignity was a little wounded. "Do you think," she added, "that I have not noticed your changed manner? It has worried me a great deal. I remember particularly the day you first met Cordelia."

"Ay!" he interrupted. "It had never come before me as it did on that day. And afterwards, when we heard Miss Héricourt's story, all my vague suspicions were turned, as if by magic, into reality. I was as sure then of the Aldergroves' crime as I am now that I have seen them."

"Mrs. Aldergrove has married again, then, — the Mr. Fielding, of whom you spoke, was her second husband," said Mrs. Hoveden reflectively. "He also was with you on the plains?"

"Yes: I recollect him. A tall, spare man, grave, and little given to speech. He had his daughter with him, — a child of about ten years of age."

"And where is she?" asked Cordelia quickly, rousing herself from the abstraction into which she had fallen. "Is she with them? Did you see her?"

"They would not let me see her," replied the Professor; "and, for that very reason, I think she must know something to their disadvantage. So much the better. They can hide her now, and prevent her from speaking. But how will it be when the matter is brought into court?"

"It shall be brought into court," said Cordelia firmly.

"I will use every means in my power to have justice meted to them."

"That is well spoken!" cried the Professor. "I feared you would shrink from the publicity involved in such a proceeding, but I am glad to see you ready to act otherwise. Remember, we are dealing with people who are determined to carry their brazen effrontery to its utmost limit. They have no pity for you, Miss Cordelia. They will even denounce you as an impostor, in addition to their other wickednesses. Let the law, therefore, take its course." He spoke sternly, bringing his clinched hand forcibly down upon the table as he uttered the last sentence.

Cordelia bent her head in assent, but did not reply. Her face, which rested on her hands, was very white; and her thoughts seemed far removed all at once from the present scene.

"I do not think I ever had such a shock in my life," continued the Professor, breaking in upon her revery. "For a long time my indignation got the better of me. I even forgot poor Richard and his wistful eyes. In fact, I could do nothing but pour forth the wrath which had been in my mind for so long, waiting patiently for an opportunity to expend itself. It certainly startled Mrs. Fielding into something like fright. Margaret, who is indeed your very image, Miss Cordelia, was not in the room at the time; but she came in afterward, and then I had it out with them both. Of course, they ordered me to leave the house; but I expected that. I said a great deal before I went, however; and our turn will come again."

"I could not have conceived such wickedness," said Cordelia. "Their scheme seems a hazardous one also. They must have counted upon final discovery."

"I think not," said the Professor. "But, at all events, their weapons of defence have, doubtless, long been sharp-

ened for the struggle, should it come. We shall see when they are brought to justice. I shall put the matter in Burton's hands to-night. We must pay these people in their own coin. Your fortune shall be recovered, Miss Cordelia, and the death of your aunt avenged, if she be dead."

Cordelia rose, and extended both hands to him. "Kind, generous friend," she said, "how can I repay you for your interest, and your goodness to me?" There were tears in her eyes; and, when the Professor answered, his voice trembled a little.

"Nonsense, nonsense!" he said abruptly. "It has been my most earnest wish to clear this matter up; because — because I like justice, and the thought of a wrong perpetrated upon a friend affects me personally. That is all. I would do as much for any one."

He left his seat, and approached his wife. "Am I forgiven, Maria?" he asked.

Cordelia did not hear the reply. She resumed her seat by the window, and gazed down the street, which was all aglow with the crimson rays of the setting sun. Up in the chestnut-tree, a bird, whose plumage of sober gray was touched with rosy light, poured forth his heart in song. There was an atmosphere of peace and tranquillity everywhere which heralded a perfect summer evening. Far overhead the white moon sailed slowly, waiting for the coming twilight to change her pale disk to gold.

Cordelia was lost in thought. At the bare idea of recovering her fortune, the old resolutions formed in Santa Fe rose up with redoubled force. Lamont, indeed, was lost to her forever; but he had said that something would come to replace him: and his words would be verified by deeds of benevolence and charity, which, though they could but imperfectly fill her life, would at least give her as much peace as she was entitled to enjoy.

A series of faces came up before her in imagination, and submitted themselves to her contemplation. First those of Margaret and her mother, side by side, and filled with unalterable hate ; then the stern features of the Superior, who claimed her share of the promised wealth that was to found a new order for the Church ; and finally, in the far, dim distance, Lamont's pale countenance seemed to smile a sad encouragement.

The voices of the Professor and his wife, talking at the other end of the room, became gradually indistinct, and at last ceased to be heard. Long shadows crept forth from the rose-colored light, and spread themselves along the street like a gray carpet. The merry bird overhead left the swaying boughs of the chestnut-tree, and flew elsewhere. Then presently a bar of silver light fell across the window-sill, and touched Cordelia's sombre dress.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

SUSPENSE.

"All infractions of love and equity in our social relations are speedily punished. They are punished by Fear. Fear is an instructor of great sagacity and the herald of all revolutions. He is a carrion-crow; and, though you see not well what he hovers for, there is death somewhere." — EMERSON.

LEFT by themselves in the drawing-room, from which the Professor had just gone, Mrs. Fielding and Margaret looked at each other for a time in speechless terror. Yet, although neither spoke, each seemed to divine the other's thoughts. A painful stillness reigned everywhere; but the beams of light, like handfuls of gold cast recklessly down by the spendthrift sun, danced merrily over the carpet as the breeze stirred the branches of the trees. Without, the beauty and harmony of nature had never been more apparent. The summer day was a hymn of silent praise emanating from every enamelled blossom on Mrs. Fielding's flower-beds, — from the very atmosphere indeed.

How strange a contrast were the faces of the two women who clung to each other within that rich apartment, among the silken cushions, the Chinese porcelains, and the gleaming marbles! To them, their surroundings for once meant nothing. What mattered it whether they inhabited a palace or a hovel while the ring of that accusing voice still sounded in their ears?

Was there silence without? Was it fancy, or did a

hundred voices suddenly shout a name which a faithful echo repeated endlessly? Surely, the air was filled with varied tones, which in a rich, rhythmical cadence, uttered the same sound continually, but with different degrees of force. Now it rose into a faint, silvery chime. Then it sank a little, growing more and more distinct, until finally it swept down into the very room with a long-drawn, triumphant cry, vibrating from one end of the apartment to the other, but lingering longest where the two women sat crouching in the quickly fading light. Still neither spoke.

After a little while the voices died gradually away, floating upward with a gentle, sighing resonance, like the silvery tone that had marked their descent. Then so deathlike a silence reigned, that Margaret could hear her mother's heart beat against the shoulder upon which Mrs. Fielding leaned. What a peculiar sound it was! Seemingly muffled, as though in fear of being overheard, and yet so distinct, that, to any one sitting in the room, it must have been apparent. Was hers, too, beating so loudly, Margaret wondered. She placed her hand on her breast, and closed her eyes.

When she re-opened them, the drawing-room was much darker. Gloom had stolen from the corners, and touched every object with a dusky shadow. The sky, bathed in a ruddy reflection cast by the declining sun, could be partly seen through the open window. A yellow haze lay in the warm atmosphere, and the tall trees looked black against the masses of pale pink clouds overhead. How long they had been sitting there, she and her mother, Margaret knew not. She heard a door close up-stairs with a sharp, quick sound; and a light footfall, probably Castaly's, was heard ascending the stairs. And yet Mrs. Fielding, clinging tightly to her daughter's arm, never moved. She was not asleep, nor did she dream, as she sat with her eyes riveted continually upon the marble statues gleaming in

the obscurity, as if she expected them to come down from their pedestals to confront her. Could they, too, accuse her?

Of what, in the mean while, was Margaret thinking? Did the final glow of an expiring conscience spring forth suddenly into flame, and illumine her mind for an instant? Did regret, with its never-ending bitterness, assail her? The gathering darkness hides her face, and perhaps it is as well that this is so. If she looked back, what did she see? A life whose maintenance had cost her more than she cared to acknowledge. Could she now renounce all claim to that which she had won by the work of her own hands and brain? Was it of this she thought? or did she dwell perchance, for one brief instant, upon the girl she had so cruelly wronged, — Cordelia, whom she had supposed dead, and who now stood forth ready to demand that which was hers by right?

Margaret shuddered a little, and drew nearer to her mother's side.

"Margaret," whispered a voice, "Margaret!"

Oh, how pitiful was this sound, like the wail of a little child imploring help! Where were the defiance, the boldness, the cold contempt, of that tone, which heretofore had been so apparent? Now this whispered name fell upon the silence like a voice from without. But the spell which had held the two women in its grasp was broken.

"It has come at last," said Margaret, under her breath. "It has come at last."

"What have we to fear?" asked Mrs. Fielding, trying to gather courage. She drew away from her daughter, and looked into her face, rendered indistinct by the gathering dusk.

"I do not know. How, indeed, should I?" replied Margaret, starting up suddenly. "I cannot tell, either, why I sit and brood over it here like this. I can shake

off this horrible feeling, and I will. Have you ever known me to be disconsolate before, mother? Do I not always accomplish whatever I undertake? Cordelia is alive, and near us, but what of that? Two are stronger than one. The money we have so hardly earned shall not be wrested from us now: it shall not." She spoke in a louder key, and then dropped her voice again. "Who can prove that we are not the Héricourts?" she asked. "Who shall declare the money to be hers, and not ours? Who shall decide?"

Her tall figure, with its white drapery, standing before Mrs. Fielding, and against the darkening twilight, appeared to increase in height. In her vehemence she had stretched forth both arms, but a moment later she let them fall again by her side.

"You forget Castaly," said Mrs. Fielding, in scarcely audible tones. "You do not remember what she said — what she knows."

"I remember well enough," replied Margaret, with some contempt. "But we need not fear her. She dreams, like her brother. Dreams are not evidence."

"Yes, yes, she dreams," whispered Mrs. Fielding. "Sit down again beside me, Margaret. I wish to feel you near me."

Margaret sank once more upon the cushions, and buried her face in both hands. In spite of her bold words, she trembled.

How forcibly does the unexpected affect us in life! Give us only a moment in which to prepare ourselves for coming events, and we will be ready to meet them half way. But, when suddenly assailed by the unlooked for, the strongest natures are startled into temporary forgetfulness. Why could not Margaret and her mother call up now the firmness they had always displayed? Together they had obtained the money, and together could they not keep it? Let Cordelia come forward if she would, — let

even old Miss Héricourt return, and face them. What cared they? What were Castaly's fantastic dreams, or the recollections of the Professor, rising like pale spectres of the past?

Margaret, sitting among the silken cushions in the gloom, thought of all this, and tried to force courage into her breast. She may have partly succeeded; for, could the Professor have come into her presence at that moment, he would have found her very different from the woman he had seen that morning. She could have looked into his eyes now without shrinking, — without even changing color. It was well for her that she thought so, — well for her that her terror could spend itself in the darkened room unperceived, leaving her white, cold, and trembling, but, at the same time, ready to meet whatever might threaten.

It has been truly said, that, when we commit a crime, the world is made of glass. It was thus with the world wherein Mrs. Fielding and Margaret lived, and it had been made so by themselves. As a result of Richard's unjust punishment, thousands would now hear of that deeper, blacker sin which, for so many years, had remained hidden within their hearts. It was the justice of Nature, which so liberally pays us for every act done by our hands from the cradle to the grave. For him who transgresses a law, be it what it may, there is retribution in store; but is virtue rewarded in an equal manner? Where is the material recompense for well-doing to be found? In regions, perhaps, too elevated for man to reach, but not here, surely.

Margaret raised her head at last, and, putting forth her hand, touched her mother's, which was moist and trembling.

"It will soon be time to light the lamps," she said, in a low tone. "We must not be found sitting here. Let us go outside."

Mrs. Fielding silently rose, and they passed out of the room to the veranda.

The sun had gone down, and the air was chilly. Yet the two women hardly realized how long they had crouched side by side in the drawing-room, from which the strange voices and the sunlight had gradually faded.

"The moon is just rising," said Margaret, pointing to the sky. "What will have happened before it rises again? Shall we be here, do you think?" She tried to laugh, but failed in the attempt.

"We shall be in prison," said Mrs. Fielding. "If Cordelia and this man Hoveden" —

"I shall never give in, let them do what they like," interrupted Margaret. "Remember, the game you have begun must be carried out to the very end. We have played for so long, that we ought to be adepts by this time."

"I do not understand how Cordelia can be alive," said Mrs. Fielding miserably. "Why should that man have deceived us about her?"

"Do New-Mexicans ever speak the truth?" asked Margaret. "I, for my part, never believed her dead. I tried to, but could not. But she cannot interfere with us now. She cannot."

She turned aside, and paced the veranda quickly, shivering a little in the cool atmosphere.

"You are a great comfort to me, Margaret," said Mrs. Fielding presently. "In the hour of doubt and trouble, you are always here to uphold me with your never-failing courage."

She spoke in a tone which she employed toward no one except her daughter, and even then it was rarely used.

If Mrs. Fielding had a single redeeming trait in her character, it was her affection for Margaret, displayed, it is true, only in moments of weakness, but, nevertheless, the one feeling akin to tenderness that her hard nature ever revealed. They were a peculiar study, these two

people. Apart, as helpless almost as babes; but, when united, what could they not accomplish? They formed together as perfect a unity, in one sense, as ever existed;—strong, energetic, inflexible. And their mutual dependence, when rightly exercised, brought forth glorious results.

“Who shall say I am not Cordelia Héricourt?” asked Margaret, stopping short in her walk, and approaching Mrs. Fielding. “Is there any difference between us except this little brown freckle on my neck?”

“I had forgotten that,” said her mother quickly. “What if it should lead to”—

“No, no,” interposed Margaret. “It shall lead to nothing.” She smiled, as if a new and agreeable thought had just risen to her mind.

“What if *she* should come back?” whispered Mrs. Fielding, with sudden terror. “She may not be dead, after all.”

“Never fear that we shall see her again,” replied Margaret. “She can do us no harm, however, even if she do return.”

James, the butler, entered the drawing-room, and lighted the lamps. A soft radiance streamed across the veranda, and touched the dark ground beyond.

“Let us go into the house,” said Margaret. “It is cold here, and the light reminds me of that dreadful night. Do you remember,” she whispered, drawing closer to her mother, “how the moonlight fell upon the vacant seat in the stage? It was like that.” She pointed to the bar of yellow light quivering on the grass.

“Do not talk so, Margaret, I implore you,” said Mrs. Fielding. “You increase my nervousness, and your own as well. Come away, and try to forget what has passed; for we have need of all our energy. We must be prepared now for the worst. Do not try your strength.”

“You are right,” Margaret answered calmly. “I shall

“speak of it no more. I think dinner must be ready, so let us go in.”

They entered the house again, their faces looking ghastly in the lamplight; but upon Margaret's features something of the old defiant expression had come back.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE TRIAL.

“ Il n’y a que Dieu et quelques génies rares pour qui la carrière s’étende à mesure qu’ils y avancent.” — DIDEROT.

THE trial of the suit brought by Cordelia Héricourt for the recovery of her property, some twenty years ago, created more excitement, perhaps, than has done any event of recent times. The two Aldergroves, their callous natures and ignoble traits artfully hidden by a seeming grace, were, of course, the central figures, and formed a peculiar contrast to Cordelia, whose maidenly reserve had given way somewhat beneath the injustice and treachery of her cousins. With a gradually increasing sense of the outrage to which she had been subjected, she showed her eagerness and her embittered feelings to some extent, only overcoming them at last by a powerful exertion of the will, which nearly always was under her control.

One could scarcely define the nature of the curiosity which drew the crowd of men and women to the courtroom on the first day of the trial. Autumn was not yet on the wane; and the long, narrow windows of the building were still supplied with dark-green shades, which cast a subdued light over the multitude of forms, and made the warmth of the day seem less. It was, doubtless, owing to this partial obscurity, that Cordelia, on entering with her

counsel, Mr. Burton, failed to discover Lamont's expectant face among the throng. Yet she was conscious of his presence, and felt indirectly the influence of the glance he must have cast upon her as she took her seat, and turned her eyes toward her cousins, who, sitting with their counsel, faced her from a short distance. It was with a sensation of nervous dread, quite unknown to her, that she gazed for the first time in many years upon the features which nothing could ever obliterate from her memory, and which had now something horrible in their outlines and stern rigidity. As she looked, she knew that her face expressed all the sensations that rose within her; and yet her glance was received, both by Margaret and Mrs. Fielding, by one of entire peacefulness. The fear which a short time before had tortured these women must have been thrown forcibly aside, for nothing apparently could now ruffle their placid countenances. They exchanged no remarks, either between themselves or with their counsel, but sat upright and motionless, waiting for the plaintiff to open the case, and betraying but little interest in the surroundings.

When Cordelia Héricourt was called to the witness-stand, at the beginning of the proceedings, those who had been unable to observe her closely since her entrance could not avoid slight exclamations of astonishment as she stepped forward. Her more than striking resemblance to one of the defendants; the air of proud dignity that accompanied her words and actions; and her slow, earnest manner of speaking, — were the subjects of much comment from the audience. She began her story in trembling tones, which, however, gradually increased in volume, each utterance falling upon the ears of the listeners with force and distinctness. No detail of importance that had occurred to her since her father's death in connection with the matter in question was omitted by her, and occasionally her answers to the interrogations addressed to

her called forth a murmur of admiration and applause. Not once did her eyes seek Lamont. He was there, she knew, watching her attentively; and every word of her testimony was filled with significance for him: but still, when her gaze wandered at all from her counsel, it was to rest upon the faces of her cousins, who, cold and unimpressed, returned the look with one in which their consciousness of final triumph lingered. To the lookers-on, the scene was one of unusual interest. The wonderful likeness between the two girls; Mrs. Fielding's stolid, unruffled demeanor; and the ever-increasing ardor of Cordelia, as she advanced in her story,—were each a special study in itself. There was far more pity than anger in her evidence toward the last. The first feelings of wrath which had burned so intensely within her passed gradually away, leaving in their stead a sentiment of combined pity and contempt. Which predominated, it would be hard to decide; for her emotion, when displayed at all, was shown in a very mild form.

She gave many details of her early life, related in full the story of the money, spoke of her illness, the departure of her aunt, her residence in the convent, her subsequent arrival in New York, and her position as governess in Professor Hoveden's family. It seemed almost impossible for the evidence to be a fabrication. It was given with such sincerity and minuteness, her memory for dates was so accurate, the description of her father and his life so consistent with well-known facts, that scarcely a person in the court-room doubted that she spoke the truth in declaring herself to be Cordelia Héricourt. When she at last left the witness-stand, without cross-examination, it was easy to see that she had the entire sympathy of her auditors. And then, for the first time, Margaret's stern features relaxed into an expression of sadness. None could better counterfeit tenderness, and the softer attri-

butes of a woman's character, than she; and Mrs. Fielding, perceiving the sudden change in her daughter, sighed deeply. The alteration in her face was not so pronounced as Margaret's, partaking more of a reflective character. And yet, all the while, in spite of their apparent indifference, the same fear which had kept them crouching in the drawing-room at Silverbridge swayed them now. Never, for an instant, did either feel relief from it. Cover it they might, by a mask of compassion or defiance; but there it remained nevertheless, to chill their blood with vague forebodings. Of what strength is human nature capable at times! What is this strange power which enables some of us to hide our quivering flesh with an outer coating of metal as impenetrable as it is sometimes brilliant? The armor chosen and put on by Mrs. Fielding and Margaret, to conceal their trembling forms, had no lustre. It was gray and unpolished, and in it were caught no friendly gleams of ease or hope. But the force of will which had brought it forth knew how to preserve it intact.

Professor Hoveden, who was the next witness, gave his testimony in a calm, straightforward way, which of itself did much to convince the listeners of its truth. He related all the incidents of the journey from Santa Fe to Independence; deposed to the request to have the rear of the stage separated from the front; to the doubts which arose in his mind in consequence of the real or fancied change in Miss Héricourt's voice; his certainty in regard to the identity of Margaret; and, finally, to finding the handkerchief marked with the name of Anastasia Héricourt near the spot where the lady had been lost, or been brought by the Indians who had captured her. All this produced a greater impression even than did the evidence given by the plaintiff; and, as in Cordelia's case, no attempt was made by the defence to shake his testimony by cross-examination, the suit seemed to be going all one way.

But the witness on whom the plaintiff placed the most dependence was to come.

Castaly Fielding was Cordelia's main support, and it had been hoped that the Superior of Our Lady of Guadalupe would have added her evidence to that of the young girl. But all attempts to find this lady had proved unavailing. It had been ascertained only that she had left the convent for the United States a short time previously, and her whereabouts at present was unknown. This had been a cruel disappointment to Cordelia and the Professor, who knew how important the Superior's presence would be; and their hopes had consequently centred themselves upon Castaly. When the girl took the stand, the Professor and Mr. Burton exchanged significant glances; and the defendants summoned all their energies to hear her story, of which they knew the substance. As Castaly, standing erect, took the oath in clear, fearless tones, a murmur of admiration ran through the large assembly. Then, with a courteous request from the judge to be seated, the examination began. Passing over the preliminaries of age, residence, relationship to the defendants, etc., we come to the main points of the evidence.

"Were you in Santa Fe, Miss Fielding, in the year 1855?"

"Yes."

"How old were you then?"

"Ten years of age."

"How did you leave Santa Fe?"

"In a stage-coach with my father."

"Which seat in the stage did you occupy?"

"The third from the end."

"Will you kindly point it out on this diagram?"

Castaly took the paper, and marked upon it with a pencil the seat she had occupied.

"Do you recollect occupying that seat, or have you only been told that you had it?"

"I recollect it distinctly."

"Who sat in the other two seats, — those forming the rear compartment?"

"Miss Anastasia Héricourt, Mrs. Aldergrove, and the young lady calling herself Miss Cordelia Héricourt."

"Have you seen these ladies since?"

"Yes: one of them is my step-mother; the other is said to be her niece, and lives with her. The third I have never seen since that dreadful night."

"What night?"

"The night on which she disappeared. I have reason to believe that this lady was Miss Anastasia Héricourt."

"And the others?"

"I have equal reason to believe them to be Mrs. Aldergrove and her daughter Margaret."

"Now, Miss Fielding, will you be kind enough to tell the court and the jury why you think the two ladies who are the defendants in this case, to be Mrs. Aldergrove and Miss Aldergrove? You must be careful to state facts, and not mere suppositions and opinions." The lawyer looked earnestly at the young girl who was bearing herself so bravely and truthfully; and the jury craned their necks forward, as if fearful of losing a word of what was to come. The counsel for the defence made his face as expressionless as possible, and Mrs. Fielding and Margaret betrayed no emotion. But the audience, like the jury, was in a fever-heat of expectation.

"My father and I occupied a seat together," began the girl, in a clear, deliberate tone. "It was the one next to the compartment belonging to the three ladies. On this particular night I could not sleep, for I fancied I heard wolves howling on the prairie; and, as I sat with closed eyes, I thought, too, that some one was whispering behind me. Every one in the front compartment of the stage was sound asleep. I heard the words 'Mother' and

‘Margaret.’ I listened attentively ; and, finding the whispering to continue, I got up on my knees, impelled by a strange fascination, and peered through a tiny hole which I discovered in the buffalo-robe serving as a partition between one compartment and the other. Although there was but little light, I could see plainly enough to recognize the forms of the ladies distinctly. One of them sat alone on the first seat. On the back-seat were the two others, and one of the latter was asleep. I heard the lady on the front seat say in a low tone, ‘O Margaret ! is it necessary to do this?’ And the other answered, ‘Mother, I have made up my mind it must be done, and I will do it.’ There was more whispering, which I could not hear very well ; and then the young lady, Miss Cordelia Héricourt as she was called, rose, and unfastened the curtain, which partly formed the back of the stage. The moonlight, which penetrated the compartment, allowed me to see clearly the faces of the occupants. The lady sitting by herself was crouching on the seat in an attitude of terror, with her hands pressed to her ears. The young lady, having rolled up the curtain, unbuckled the strap which supported the back on one side ; and after a moment’s hesitation, during which she gazed at the face of the sleeping lady, she unfastened the remaining strap on the opposite side. She held the back in its place for an instant, and then suddenly let it go, giving, at the same time, a vigorous push to the lady, who leaned heavily against it. I saw the sleeping form thrown violently backward, and I thought I heard it strike the ground as the stage rolled on. Terrified by what I had heard and seen, I sank down upon my seat again, and did not move till morning.”

Castaly paused. The horror of the court and the jury at her recital, made, as it was, with all the fervor of truth, was intense ; and for some moments a subdued excitement

prevailed among the hearers. Dark, angry glances were cast upon the defendants, who, calm and collected, displayed very little interest in what had been said. The lawyer for the plaintiff, observing the impression that had been made, hastened to improve his advantage.

"Miss Fielding," he said, "from what you saw of the events of that night, are you prepared to say who was pushed out of the stage, and who committed the deed?"

"I am prepared to say who committed the deed. It was one of the defendants yonder," indicating Margaret. "The one who was pushed out, — fell out, as it was supposed, — they said was Mrs. Aldergrove; but I do not believe it was she."

"You think the remaining ladies in the stage were the present defendants in court?"

"The same," said Castaly, looking at them unflinchingly.

"What makes you think so?"

"Because the younger one was called Margaret by the elder; because they spoke of the other lady as 'Anastasia;' and, in the years that I have lived with them, I have repeatedly heard them call each other 'mother' and 'Margaret;' because there were no reasons for killing Mrs. Aldergrove, while there were many reasons why Mrs. Aldergrove and her daughter should kill Miss Héricourt; and, finally, because what I saw explains fully an event which actually happened."

The lawyer seemed quite satisfied, and had no further questions to ask. Turning to the counsel on the other side, with a look of triumph he could not wholly conceal, he said briefly, "You can take the witness."

The lawyer rose to begin his cross-examination in a calm, cold manner, giving evidence of the slight impression produced by Castaly's story. The sentiment of the entire court-room was against his clients, he knew; but

he succeeded in preserving an impassiveness which announced his belief in the strength of his cause.

"Miss Fielding," he began, in a dry tone, fixing his eyes steadily on the girl, "did you mention to your father what you had seen?"

"I tried to tell him about it the next morning."

"And what did he say?"

"I thought it had all been a dream at the time, and spoke of it as such; but my father did not care to hear it, so I said nothing more about it. I knew later, however, that it had not been a dream."

"Yes, so you have told us. You have a brother, Miss Fielding, have you not?"

"Yes," said Castaly, in some wonder.

"Do you know of any instance in which he has upheld as the truth that which, in reality, was a dream?"

"Why, yes," answered the girl frankly. "He dreamed, not long ago, that he saw men forcing their way, during the night, into our house at Silverbridge. Mrs. Fielding punished him for declaring to be the truth that which she thought to be wilful falsehood. But I was sure he had dreamed the whole story. He often confounds his dreams with realities."

Castaly had no sooner uttered these words than she regretted them, and she regretted them the more when the lawyer's pitiless tones again were heard.

"How do you know, Miss Fielding, that your story is not a dream?" he asked.

"Because I saw all that I have related," faltered Castaly, "and because it is an explanation of a real event."

"Ah, yes! But your brother saw the men enter the house, did he not?"

"He thought he did."

"He was certain of it?"

"Yes."

"As certain as you are now?"

"Yes; but there was no foundation for his story."

"That will do, Miss Fielding. But stop a moment," he added. "Are you sure the defendants in this case are mother and daughter?"

"I suspect it to be so."

"But are you sure?"

"As sure as I can be of any thing not wholly within my own knowledge," answered Castaly. "I have said I have often heard Mrs. Fielding inadvertently, apparently, call the other 'Margaret,' and then instantly and with embarrassment correct herself, and say 'Cordelia.' I have also heard her whom I believe to be Margaret Aldergrove call Mrs. Fielding 'mother;' and once I found, in an old book left by one of them in the summer-house, a letter addressed to 'Miss Margaret Aldergrove,' and which Miss Cordelia, as she is styled, was very much afraid I had read. Of course, I had not," said Castaly indignantly.

"You are quite sure you did not dream these things?"

"Yes, quite sure."

"Well, we will let you remain sure, if you so prefer. That will do, Miss Fielding."

Castaly resumed her seat much crestfallen. She had been so pathetically in earnest, and had told her story in so straightforward a way, that opinion had been universally in favor of the plaintiff. But at this peculiar doubt cast upon the truth of her testimony by the counsel for the defence, much discussion arose; and it was easy to see that further effort on her part to impress the court with a sense of the correctness of her story would be useless.

Paul Lamont was the next witness called; and Cordelia, who saw him then for the first time since the opening of the trial, felt the blood rush suddenly to her face, and every thing connected with the immediate surroundings seemingly fade away, to give place to reflections of a far

different character. How would he bear himself, she wondered? And what could he be able to say that would give her the encouragement she needed doubly, now that Castaly's evidence had lost, so to speak, all importance? Lamont allowed his eyes to meet hers but once as he took the stand. It was not an easy task that he had to perform, by any means; and he knew how much depended upon his manner of acquitting himself. To rise boldly, and relate the wrongs of the woman he loved, and, at the same time, conceal a portion of his interest, was difficult indeed. But it was, perhaps, the presence of the defendants, and the sight of their hard features imbued with a spirit of well-directed hypocrisy, that relieved him somewhat, and made him grow eloquent as he spoke. He felt, however, that Cordelia watched him throughout with feverish expectancy, hanging upon his testimony as a child might cling to an only protector.

He dwelt for some time upon the character of the plaintiff, which he had learned to know so well; upon her life in Santa Fe, where she had been forsaken by her relatives; upon her subsequent struggles; the hopes she had been forced to renounce, and the misery she had suffered. He referred to the probable death of the real Miss Héricourt in tones of horror and indignation, during which the defendants sat, to all appearance, unmoved. But Lamont would hardly have borne himself with such courage could he have suspected for an instant the terrible disappointment in store for him.

The letter written to him by old Miss Héricourt, and announcing her departure from Santa Fe with the Alder-groves, was the basis upon which the whole strength of his evidence rested. It had been taken by him that morning from a packet of yellow-tinged papers, which he had not looked at for years. On leaving New Mexico he had gathered up his letters and manuscripts, and thrown them

into a small trunk, which had remained unopened ever since. But the letter among them was not forgotten ; and, almost in ecstasy at the contemplation of the service he might render to Cordelia by its production, he had, before coming to the scene of the trial that day, untied the faded pink ribbon that bound the papers together. The musty odor that was exhaled from the trunk, and the sight of the half-worn sheets, carried him back in fancy to events long ago forgotten, and to hopes which he had once fondly cherished, but never realized. The precious document was removed with trembling fingers and a sad smile from the midst of the others, which had been its companions for so long ; and, having read it through once, Lamont placed it carefully in his pocket-book.

The fact that this letter was in his possession had lent him an increase of zeal and animation, particularly as the disastrous effect produced by Castaly's evidence would, he thought, be counteracted by the contents of the small sheet of paper written in Miss Héricourt's delicate hand. So when he referred, in the course of his remarks, to having received such a letter from her, his voice naturally had a triumphant ring.

"You say Miss Héricourt informed you by letter of her departure from Santa Fe?" inquired the counsel for the plaintiff calmly. "Have you that letter still, Mr. Lamont?"

"Yes, I have it with me."

"Be so kind, then, as to produce it," said the lawyer, in a tone of satisfaction.

Lamont glanced at Cordelia, who was regarding him earnestly. His look seemed to bid her take courage ; and, indeed, the mention of the letter, of whose existence she had not even been aware, had filled her anew with hope and strength. Miss Héricourt had doubtless given therein the particulars of her departure, and made reference to

the removal of her niece to the convent. If so, what better proof could she have of her cousin's baseness? She looked again at Lamont, almost imploringly, as he thrust his hand into his pocket in search of the paper. A breathless silence reigned in the court-room, only broken by the buzzing of a few flies against the window-panes, through which the broad noonday glare penetrated but moderately, in consequence of the blinds of sober green. Every eye was fixed upon Lamont, who evidently had forgotten in which pocket he had placed the letter; for he appeared a little confused, and hastily sought it elsewhere than the place in which he had supposed it to be. A sudden change had passed meanwhile over the stony features of the defendants, — a look of such utter terror that it was fortunate all were too much engrossed in watching Lamont to observe the alteration of their faces. Margaret's long, slender fingers twisted themselves nervously together, and a cold perspiration broke out upon her forehead. Mrs. Fielding had started forward, and with frightened eyes was regarding Lamont, whose confusion had given way to astonishment as he still sought for the letter, first in one pocket, and then in the other.

"Well," inquired the lawyer, in a tone of mingled impatience and anxiety, "have you the letter, Mr. Lamont?"

"I had it," he replied, in a voice quite at variance with his former animation. "I had it here in this pocket. I put it there myself this morning."

"Do you mean that you have lost it?" asked the lawyer, with a gesture of annoyance.

"It has been stolen from me. It was in my pocket-book. That has gone too," said Lamont hopelessly. He thrust his hand once more into the breast of his coat, as if in hope of yet finding the letter there. "No, no, it is gone, and my money as well," he said finally. "I do not care about the money, — that does not matter, — but the

letter. It is a terrible loss." He appeared for the moment utterly overcome by the blow, and pressed his hand to his forehead, as if trying to collect his thoughts. "I remember," he said mechanically, "that some one brushed against me rudely, as I came up the stairs leading to the court-room to-day. The crowd was so great, that the ascent was necessarily a slow one. I was obliged to stop at intervals, and it was during one of these that I felt a man press roughly against me. He must have stolen my pocket-book, which contained the letter. I can account for its loss in no other way."

The quiet of the court-room gave place suddenly to the most intense excitement, the subdued hum of voices rising gradually into definite expressions. Lamont closed his eyes, not daring to meet Cordelia's despairing glance; while she, whose hopefulness was thus cast rudely aside by a commonplace and unexpected trifle, turned her head aside, fearing he might see the tears which involuntarily had risen to her eyes, and which she knew would make his disappointment yet harder to bear.

But on the faces of the defendants how keen a joy was marked! Subdued the light in the court-room might be to all who sat there, but to them it was filled with rays of surpassing brilliancy. Who would say that in the shadow of these women lurked no friendly genius who presided over their destinies, and guided them safely past every danger?

"This is very unfortunate," said the counsel for the plaintiff, almost testily. "The letter was of vital importance. Do you recall the contents distinctly enough to swear to them, Mr. Lamont?"

"Why, yes," said Lamont, recovering himself, and brightening a little. "I remember the contents well, for I read the letter this morning. Miss Héricourt wrote to announce her departure from Santa Fe with the two Alder-

groves, while her niece, Cordelia, was to remain behind in the convent of Our Lady of Guadalupe. I saw Miss Héricourt after the receipt of the letter, and spoke to her about the journey in Miss Aldergrove's presence. It was I also who superintended Miss Cordelia Héricourt's removal to the convent."

"Are you prepared to swear that the young lady who remained in Santa Fe was Miss Héricourt's niece?"

"Yes. I knew her intimately, while I had but a formal acquaintance with Miss Aldergrove."

"Do you recognize the plaintiff to be Cordelia Héricourt?"

"I do," said Lamont firmly. "I have not the shadow of a doubt on the subject."

"Very well," said the counsel, apparently satisfied. "That will do, Mr. Lamont."

And then came the cross-examination, which was as complete as possible, and as shrewd as the circumstances of the case required. Every material point was gone over, but nothing calculated to weaken the force of the evidence was elicited. On the contrary, several things tending to show the identity of the plaintiff with Cordelia Héricourt were brought to light, very much to the disgust of the defendant's lawyer. But he had not yet done with Lamont.

"What is your profession, Mr. Lamont?" he inquired with asperity.

"I am a literary man."

"Has that always been your profession?"

Lamont colored; but he answered bravely, "No: I was once a Roman-Catholic priest."

"Ah! you were once a Roman-Catholic priest? And why are you not still a priest?"

"Because I preferred to renounce the priesthood."

"Why?"

"I thought it was my duty to do so."

"May it please the court," cried Mr. Burton, rising excitedly, "this has nothing to do with the case."

"I beg my learned brother's pardon," said the lawyer for the defence, waving his hand: "it has a good deal to do with it, as I shall presently show."

"Go on," said the judge.

"You renounced the priesthood, and you were deposed, were you not?"

"Yes."

"Now, Mr. Lamont, were you not in love with the lady whom you now say is Cordelia Héricourt?"

Mr. Burton again rose to interpose an objection, but Lamont motioned him to be silent.

"I was much attached to Cordelia Héricourt," he said gravely, "and I still am. But, if you mean to imply that I left the priesthood on that account, you are as false as your clients."

"We shall see, we shall see," said the lawyer, nodding his head wisely. "In the mean time I have to ask that the latter part of the witness's answer be stricken out."

"It will be stricken out," said the judge.

"You thought she had money?" resumed the lawyer.

"I did not think on the subject in that connection."

"You knew she had money, did you not?"

"I knew she had money which she intended to devote to a religious purpose."

"And if she married you, an apostate priest, the money would not be so devoted?"

"I never intended to marry her, and do not now intend to do so," said Lamont firmly. "I left the priesthood for reasons which I know were pure and honorable."

"Ah, yes!" said the lawyer, nodding again. "And so you loved her without intending to marry her. That will do, Mr. Lamont."

"No," said Mr. Burton, rising, and speaking with great

dignity, "it will not do. You have made an attempt to outrage the witness, — one which is without precedent in all my experience at the bar. I shall therefore insist, your Honor, that he be allowed to relate all the facts connected with his leaving the priesthood. We have nothing to fear if the whole truth be told."

"That is only right," said the judge. "The witness may make any statement he chooses."

Lamont then, with clearness and frankness, detailed all the circumstances allied to the renunciation of his priestly vows. He omitted nothing which related to his motives; and, when he left the stand, the minds of the court, the jury, and the audience, were strongly impressed with a sense of his upright and honest conduct, while the counsel for the defendants was ashamed of his pitiful course.

As for Cordelia, at first overwhelmed with mortification for herself and compassion for Lamont, she felt her love grow stronger at every word he spoke. Here was a man whom she was glad indeed to call friend. She followed him with her eyes as he left the witness-stand, and her gaze did not leave him until he was lost in the crowd.

Then she thought of the Superior. Could she have been present to testify to her residence in the convent, all would yet go well. Conclusive as Lamont's testimony had been, it had probably lost some of its force with the jury, owing to the fact of his being what is commonly termed a "renegade priest."

Fate, thought poor Cordelia, was surely against her just now. Castaly's evidence had, of course, passed for naught. Lamont's inability to produce the letter had robbed his testimony of some of its value, while her own evidence had been weakened by the inability to find the Superior. For, although she and the latter had not parted in a very friendly spirit, Cordelia felt that mother Teresa would at least identify her satisfactorily. If she could prove con-

clusively to the jury that she was the person who remained in Santa Fe, and lived for some time in the convent, victory was assured. Thus far the evidence had been precise on this point. But it must be confessed, that a little less confidence on the part of her counsel might have led to more effort to obtain additional testimony. Still, it was not apparent how the positive assertions of Cordelia and Lamont could be counteracted, supported as they were by the strongest collateral circumstances, and by the evidence of Castaly and the Professor.

And, with matters standing thus, the plaintiff closed her case on the second day of the trial.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE VERDICT.

“Tremble, thou wretch,
That hast within thee undivulged crimes,
Unwhipped of justice.”

KING LEAR.

WHEN the defence opened its case on the fifth day, and Margaret took the stand, the most intense interest was excited among the spectators. Her likeness to Cordelia, as has been before said, did not extend beyond a physical limit; and the contrast between the former's unaffected speech, and Margaret's words delivered with half-closed eyes and compressed lips, was very marked. And yet her story was told so consistently, that it was impossible for many to doubt its truth. In the midst of it also crept evidences of sympathy for the misguided cousin who sought to wrong her, and more than once she stopped in the course of her testimony to cast upon Cordelia a look of intense pity. Mrs. Fielding sat by, and gazed upon her daughter with a heart overflowing with admiration. And even to Lamont and the Professor, who watched and understood her, there was something about Margaret's well-conceived and well-uttered sentences that partook almost of the sublime. Notwithstanding their contempt for the part she played, the heroism of her conduct was not lost upon them; and its influence even extended to Cordelia.

Of what glorious results was a nature such as Margaret's capable! Powers of endurance, concentration, and perseverance were displayed by her in so excellent a manner, that it was pitiable to see them exercised upon ends so degrading. Her whole life since she had known of the existence of her cousins' fortune had been devoted to the securing of the money. She had succeeded in her purpose, and had enjoyed the delights of wealth. The bodily ease which accompanies riches had also been hers. Should she lose these things now, existence would be worse than a blank, and the talents she had so artfully cultivated would represent but so much energy expended in the wrong direction. With the full sense of this, she gave her evidence in a way which was likely to secure for her the confidence of the court and auditors. She declared herself to be Cordelia Héricourt, and affirmed that she had left Santa Fe in company with her aunt, Miss Anastasia Héricourt, — now Mrs. Fielding, the co-defendant in the suit, — and her cousin, Mrs. Aldergrove. Her other cousin, Margaret Aldergrove, the plaintiff, who was not very well, preferred to remain in Santa Fe. Why she did so, the witness was unable to state; but she had her reasons for the belief which she entertained on the subject, and which she would rather not state. She exhibited the register of the stage-office, and the way-bill, both duly certified, and showing that Cordelia Héricourt was one of the passengers on the day specified. This produced a strong effect on the court and the jury. On the journey from Santa Fe, her cousin, Mrs. Aldergrove, the mother of the plaintiff, had fallen out of the stage in her sleep, and could not afterwards be found. The witness and her aunt, the co-defendant now in court, went to France, and obtained the money that belonged to them. She herself had gone no farther than Paris, having been taken seriously ill in that city; but her aunt proceeded to Avignon with the evidence,

and with the certificate of her physician that Cordelia Héricourt was too ill to accompany her. This certificate was produced. The claim to the fortune, witness continued, had been at once recognized by the authorities, and especially by the Bishop of Avignon, who had communicated with the Bishop of Santa Fe in regard to the Héricourts, and received from him copies of their photographs. Miss Anastasia Héricourt was subsequently married to Mr. Fielding, who had been one of the passengers in the stage: and the marriage certificate was produced, showing that on the 18th of July, 1859, at the American legation in Paris, Edward Sanford Fielding had wedded Anastasia Héricourt; the witnesses being the American minister to France, René Guilbert d'Héricourt, and Cordelia Héricourt.

The witness denied emphatically that she had pushed her cousin, Mrs. Aldergrove, out of the stage. What object could she have had in so doing?

The cross-examination began with a series of sharp interrogations in relation to her early life, her education, whom she had known, and other matters calculated to exhibit her knowledge of the Héricourts. But Margaret proved herself equal to the occasion; for she never hesitated for an answer, nor deviated in the slightest degree from the story she had told, and the system of probabilities she had assumed as the basis of her testimony. Her *non mi ricordi* were few and far between.

Obviously, however, the whole case turned on the point as to which of the two, Cordelia Héricourt or Margaret Aldergrove, had remained in Santa Fe. Thus far the evidence was, to say the least, conflicting. Cordelia began to feel that the testimony of the Superior of Our Lady of Guadalupe was absolutely necessary for the success of her cause; and yet this was something she had been unable to obtain, notwithstanding all her efforts. What,

then, was her astonishment, when, in the midst of her thoughts, she heard the voice of the crier call out in a loud, resonant tone, "Mother Teresa!"

Raising her eyes, Cordelia saw the portly figure of the Superior enter the court-room from the judge's private chamber, in which she had been sitting. Slowly, as if thoroughly impressed with the duty imposed upon her, Mother Teresa walked to the witness-stand, and took the oath. Had old Miss Héricourt herself suddenly arisen in the midst of the assembly, her appearance could hardly have created more consternation and amazement among some of those present than did the Superior's. How she got there, neither Cordelia nor her counsel could discover; but both presumed that Margaret and her mother, knowing, doubtless, that an attempt would be made by the plaintiff to summon the Superior, had anticipated matters by securing her for themselves. But her presence called forth such hope in Cordelia's breast as had not been there since the opening of the trial. Summoned by the defence she might be; but, when it came to the question of Cordelia's identity, there was little doubt of what the result would be. When Mother Teresa, therefore, began to testify, it was an exciting moment for many in the court-room. Apart from all else, it was impossible for Cordelia to see this stern, somewhat gloomy, figure, without experiencing a keen emotion; and Lamont, peering through the crowd to catch a glimpse of the witness, felt, in spite of the disagreeable recollections her face recalled, a renewal of much that he had looked upon as banished completely from his life. She seemed to be a connecting-link between himself and Cordelia, who were now so widely separated; and both, as they regarded her, saw the present, with its forcible reality and sharp significance, slip imperceptibly away, to give rise to other scenes witnessed and endured long ago, and long ago thought to be buried.

The Superior had changed very little since we last saw her close the resounding doors of the convent upon Cordelia Héricourt. Her face looked no older, and her severe black gown, with the long cross and chain hanging from her side, needed but the accessories of a bunch of keys, a pair of slippered feet, and the grim surroundings of Our Lady of Guadalupe, to make Lamont and Cordelia fancy they had seen her but yesterday.

After the usual preliminary examination, the questions of the defendant's counsel bore upon the matters at issue.

"Are you acquainted with Miss Cordelia Héricourt?" he inquired in his blandest manner.

"I am."

"Do you see her now in the court-room? If so, be good enough to point her out."

"I see her. She sits by your side," said Mother Teresa unhesitatingly.

If Cordelia had been struck by lightning, her face could not have exhibited a more horrified expression than it did at this answer, which was enforced by the Superior pointing to Margaret, and adding, "Yes, I recognize her distinctly. She is Cordelia Héricourt."

"Did she ever stay with you at the convent of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Santa Fe?"

"No: she occasionally visited the convent, but she never staid there longer than an hour or two at a time."

"Did any one calling herself Cordelia Héricourt ever stay with you for several months?"

"Yes: a young lady whom I recognize in the person who sits there (pointing with one of her long, bony fingers at Cordelia), and whom I now know to be Margaret Aldergrove, deceived me by representing herself to be Cordelia Héricourt. She had not been long in the convent before I began to suspect she was an impostor. She had been brought there by an apostate priest, one Paul Lamont,

who also said she was Cordelia Héricourt, and for love of whom he had renounced the priesthood. Her manners and sentiments were altogether different from those of the Cordelia Héricourt I had known," continued the Superior with a sigh. "Her views of religion were not such as a girl like Cordelia would have entertained. Still, I was not fully convinced of the deception practised upon me until after her departure. Then I learned that the real Cordelia Héricourt had been gone for several months. Inquiry at the stage-office, and examination of the passenger-register, confirmed the rumor. I knew then," said the Superior, using a favorite expression, "that I had nourished a viper in my bosom."

"Do you know," inquired the counsel, "why Margaret Aldergrove perpetrated this fraud upon you?"

"Certainly. She was in love with Paul Lamont, and he was in love with Cordelia Héricourt. I think her object was to impose upon him, and induce him to marry her."

"You are sure you recognize one of the defendants to be Cordelia Héricourt?"

"There is no doubt of her being Cordelia Héricourt," said the Superior emphatically. "The plaintiff is her exact image; but, to me, there are differences between them that others, perhaps, would not detect. Besides, Cordelia has often told me of a means of distinguishing her from her cousin."

"Indeed!" said the counsel in some surprise, while the court and spectators displayed a fresh interest. The Professor's eyes met Cordelia's, and he nodded encouragingly to her.

"What is this difference between them?" inquired the lawyer.

"Miss Aldergrove had a little brown freckle or mole on the back of her neck, while Cordelia Héricourt had none," said the Superior, rolling her eyes upward.

"Indeed!" said the counsel. "If my learned brother," he added, addressing Mr. Burton, "has no objection, it might perhaps facilitate the ends of justice if he would advise his client to allow the jury to look at the back of her neck. Or perhaps it will be less annoying to her if she will permit me to examine it."

Cordelia rose instantly; and her eyes fell upon Margaret, who was regarding her with an expression of curiosity quite devoid of the alarm she had expected to see. Was some fresh deception here involved? Was this test destined to fail as the others had done? A choking sensation rose in Cordelia's throat, as, advancing to where the counsel sat, she saw the Superior gaze upon her with no sign of recognition. In vain did she glance appealingly at the hard, uncompromising features of the woman she knew so well. But, beyond the interest which the likeness between the two girls naturally called forth, Mother Teresa's countenance expressed nothing.

Cordelia bowed her head silently, displaying the firm, graceful contour of her neck. She was conscious, in so doing, that Margaret's calm smile rested upon her, imparting a sense of uneasiness she could not well define.

There was, of course, no mark to be seen upon the white flesh, from which the heavy masses of dark hair were drawn upward, and fastened in a thick knot. At this unexpected discovery, the Superior gave such a start that her chain of beads struck against the chair with a harsh sound. The counsel for the defence seemed utterly overwhelmed with astonishment, while the lawyer for the plaintiff smiled significantly. Cordelia, however, did not share his feelings. Something, she knew not what, hung over her threateningly, like a storm-cloud ready to burst through a blue summer sky.

"Perhaps it would be yet more conducive to the ends of justice," said Mr. Burton, addressing the defendant's

counsel, "if your client would allow me to look at her neck."

The counsel was clearly annoyed at the turn affairs had taken, for he evidently expected to find the freckle on Cordelia's neck. He was, however, obliged to consent to Mr. Burton's proposition; and, at his request, a moment later Margaret rose, after whispering something to Mrs. Fielding, and approached Mr. Burton without hesitation, meeting the Superior's steady glance with one equally as firm. Cordelia in the mean while had grown very pale, and sat with her hands tightly pressed together; while her parted lips and fixed eyes showed the suspense she was undergoing.

Margaret wore about her neck a kerchief of fine muslin tied carelessly, the ends hanging loosely over the front of her gown. She expressed no surprise at the request made to her, that the back of her neck might be examined; but, in very much the same way as Cordelia had done, she bent her head, having previously pushed aside the muslin folds about her throat. A breathless silence reigned throughout the court-room; and upon every face was marked intense expectancy, mingled with an excitement which, though subdued, might break forth momentarily into turbulence. The counsels, the jury, the entire court, in fact, leaned eagerly forward as Margaret thrust back the folds of her kerchief, exposing the pure white throat and neck which supported her proud head.

There was no mark there!

Rubbing his eyes in confused astonishment, the counsel for the plaintiff fell back upon his chair; while the Superior, with an exclamation, scanned Margaret's features, and then fixed her eyes with a penetrating look upon Cordelia, who, being in a measure prepared for this new evidence of her cousin's dishonesty, sat quietly by with an expression of resigned hopelessness. But among the au-

dience rose a clamor of tongues, and such agitation as had not previously been witnessed. Two only among them remained pale and silent. These were Lamont and the Professor, who, side by side, witnessed Margaret's triumph and Cordelia's despair with feelings which prevented each from meeting the other's glance.

By and by, when something like order was restored, the Superior's examination was continued.

"Who first called your attention to the existence of this mark on Miss Aldergrove's neck, and its absence in Miss Héricourt?"

"Miss Héricourt mentioned it to me first; and then the plaintiff, Miss Aldergrove as I believe her to be, spoke of it while she was with me in the convent. After that I examined her neck one afternoon while she was asleep, and found the spot she had indicated was discolored with tincture of iodine. She was probably then trying to remove it."

Here Mr. Burton interposed by remarking that probabilities were not wanted, and that the witness must be good enough to confine herself to what she knew. He demanded that the latter part of the answer be stricken out.

The judge so directed.

The cross-examination revealed the facts that the witness had had several interviews with the defendants, and had conversed with them in regard to the points of the case. When asked if she thought Margaret Aldergrove could have successfully imposed upon Lamont, she did not deny that it would have been difficult; but he might have been Margaret's accomplice for all she knew. In regard to the iodine stains, she admitted also that the excuse of a stiff neck had been given by her visitor, and that the remedy had been prescribed by a physician.

In all other respects no serious inroads were made on

her evidence, but it was easy to see that she was greatly prejudiced against the plaintiff.

As time went on, and the proceedings were thus drawing to a close, Cordelia grew sick and weary of it all. The confidence of success which, in the beginning, had sustained her, had entirely disappeared. Day by day, too, she had noted the Professor's changing expression. There were lines upon his face which had been traced by the sharp finger of disappointment; and, although he sought continually to cheer her with words of comfort and encouragement, she felt instinctively that they did not proceed from any consciousness of ultimate success.

Finally, nothing remained but to hear Mrs. Fielding's testimony previously to summing up the case, and pronouncing judgment in favor of the plaintiff or the defendants. Mrs. Fielding's story was substantially the same as Margaret's, and contained nothing of special importance, except that she declared that the handkerchief found by the Professor was one she had lost, and that she produced the photographs which had been instrumental in securing the fortune. That of the younger lady might represent either Margaret or Cordelia, and the experts who examined it were unable to say definitely which of the girls had sat for it. As for the remaining portrait, it certainly was strikingly like Mrs. Fielding; and, as the other lady had disappeared, no comparison could be made between the two. Occasionally some pathos intruded itself upon Mrs. Fielding's words. Was it likely, she asked sadly, that she and her niece would have returned to America, had they been impostors? Would they voluntarily have come to a place where exposure was inevitable? Surely not. And then her calmness, her evident pity for her unscrupulous cousin, the absence of all resentment, appealed powerfully to the court and the jury. She actu-

ally at one time permitted a few tears to roll down her well-preserved cheek.

Mr. Burton, in summing up for the plaintiff, made the most of the evidence that had been adduced in her behalf. He declared that the fraud had been initiated in the act of departure from Santa Fe, when Margaret Aldergrove had assumed Cordelia's name, and Mrs. Aldergrove that of Miss Héricourt. He called attention to all the strong points in Cordelia's and Lamont's evidence, and dwelt with terrible force on the frank and obviously truthful recital of Castaly; contending that the defendants had tried to murder Miss Anastasia Héricourt, in order that they might be free from all interference in their nefarious schemes for getting possession of the money. And then, with a warm tribute to the devotion of Lamont and Professor Hoveden, who, in all her trials, had never lost faith in the plaintiff's cause, he demanded a verdict for her who came into court with a pure heart, in search of the justice of which hitherto she had been deprived.

The counsel for the defence spoke with the confidence of one who was sure of his case. There was one point, however, upon which he hoped the jury would not doubt. The attempt had been made, on the evidence of an hysterical girl, to fix the crime of murder on his clients. Let the jury rebuke that effort in the way it deserved. The money was nothing in comparison with the charge of fraud and crime; but it must, he continued, be apparent to every one of the jury, and to all within the sound of his voice, that the trial had triumphantly established the innocence of his clients, and their right to the names they bore. He then made a searching analysis of the evidence for and against his clients; and, with an eloquent appeal to the jury to do their duty fearlessly, he sat down, confident that his case was already won.

The judge, in charging the jury, directed their atten-

tion to the conflicting character of much of the evidence. He reminded them that they were not to be influenced by any thing but the evidence, as they understood it; and then, with a few remarks on the law applicable to the case, he placed the question clearly before them. If they believed the plaintiff to be Cordelia Héricourt, they must find for her on all the points involved. If, however, they believed Mrs. Fielding to be Miss Anastasia Héricourt, and the other defendant to be Cordelia Héricourt, they must render a verdict in their favor. The difficulties of the case, he remarked, were greatly increased by the remarkable resemblance between the plaintiff and the younger defendant, and by, as he understood, an equally strong likeness between the other defendant and the lady who had disappeared so mysteriously from the stage.

When the jury left the court-room to decide upon the verdict, an almost unbroken silence reigned for a while. Lamont and the Professor talked together in low tones; but on each countenance was visible a nervous expectancy, almost as intense as that displayed by the plaintiff and the defendants. Now and then one of the latter would bend forward to whisper to the other, but there was no regular interchange of remarks between them. Through the long, narrow windows the sun fell slantwise, touching the people, and then gliding slowly onward until it rested upon Cordelia, and turned a fold of Margaret's kerchief into gold. The faint summer breeze stirring without strove vainly to penetrate the green blinds, and sweep through the assembly. In the mean while, time was passing quickly. The large clock at the far end of the court-room ticked with a loud, discordant sound, as its giant hands moved swiftly forward. Some of the people already began to show signs of impatience. Lamont spoke no longer, but sat, with folded arms and downcast eyes, waiting for the door at the other side of the apartment to open.

What was passing behind it? What words were being spoken? What judgment pronounced? Oh, that he might burst it open, and advance into the midst of the men who there took counsel with each other! And yet, strange inconsistency! he wished it might remain closed forever. Every instant he turned his head toward those silent but expressive panels with a glance of forced composure, which relapsed almost immediately into rev-
ery.

And the Professor, sitting there in the soft light, how did he bear himself? His face hardly betrayed anxiety as his eyes, fixed, not upon the door through which the jury would shortly enter, but upon the two women whose fate was to be decided, sought to discover that which their stern countenances failed to reveal. Be the verdict what it might, he longed, with restless impatience, to hear it. His mood was a strange contrast to that of Lamont, whose calm dignity, though occasionally enlivened by a passing gleam of emotion, was never absent.

The heat was momentarily growing more intense, and Margaret had just drawn from her pocket a small black fan with which to cool her flushed cheeks, when suddenly the door opened, and the jury filed solemnly into the court-room. Their faces were as absolutely wanting in expression as that of the big clock, and nothing in their attitudes announced what was to come. The murmur of conversation ceased abruptly. Lamont drew himself up with determination; and the Professor, trembling with excitement, bent forward with every nerve strained to its utmost. Cordelia outwardly was calm, and no one would have suspected the disquiet which filled her breast to overflowing. There was no visible alteration in the manner of the defendants, except that Margaret, with her head thrown well back, had half closed her eyes, — a habit she had when laboring under a weight of feeling.

The clerk of the court rose, and went through the form of address in tones that were full and distinct.

"Gentlemen of the jury, have you agreed upon a verdict?"

"We have," replied the foreman.

"How say you?" continued the clerk. "Do you find for the plaintiff, or the defendants?"

There was a pause. Margaret's face grew suddenly deathly white, and her fingers tightened on the arms of her chair.

"For the defendants," was the answer, delivered deliberately and impressively.

Margaret relaxed her hold upon the chair, and clasped her hands convulsively together. A look of mingled relief and triumph shot from beneath her lids toward Cordelia, who remained cold and motionless, gazing blankly before her at the people, who looked like an indistinct mass afar off. Mrs. Fielding rose, and laid her hand on Margaret's arm with a gesture of delight; and together they received the congratulations of the few who approached them. A low, whispering sound, swelling louder and louder, rose from the listeners. Now it expressed delight at the verdict rendered, now intense chagrin. Lamont and the Professor alone were silent, as if stunned by a heavy blow. Had they heard aright? Did the faces of Mrs. Fielding and Margaret actually wear that look of supreme exultation, or was it imaginary? No, a thousand times no! And yet each knew in his heart that all was over. This, then, was human justice.

Slowly, at last, Lamont rose, unable to remain longer in the presence of the victors, and laid a heavy hand on the Professor's shoulder.

"Go to her," he said briefly. "She is alone, and has need of you."

"Ah, yes!" said the Professor, as if the consciousness

of where he was, and what he was to do, had just dawned upon him. "Poor girl,—poor Cordelia. But you," he added, after a pause, "are you not going to speak to her?"

"No," said Lamont, with an effort. "There are reasons which prevent my speaking to her just now. At this moment, perhaps, my sympathy might help to comfort her; but I am not at liberty to bestow it. Do not ask me why. If it could be revealed, so true a friend as you are should be the first to know it. But I must carry my motives now, as always, securely locked in my heart. Pray tell her, however, that, in the hour of her trouble, she was not forgotten by me, and that, if any effort of mine could have insured her success, she would now be triumphant. Will you say also" — He hesitated.

"How will she bear it? How will she bear it?" said the Professor mechanically, hardly noting the other's words.

"Can you ask?" replied Lamont. "Has she ever given way under sorrow or disappointment? She is not mercenary. She does not care for the money. It was the sense of injustice that oppressed her, and she desired so ardently to be of service to the Church she loves. It is this which will affect her principally. The Superior too" —

"It is the injustice which maddens me," burst forth the Professor vehemently. "I cannot speak of it calmly. My whole soul cries out against this outrage. I wish now I had not found these women. At this very moment they are glorying in their victory. How can such things be? Will these two prosper forever? Will the day never dawn in which retribution will overtake them, and lay them low in the dust?"

"Ah!" said Lamont, "these matters are not often revealed to us. They may have suffered,—perhaps they suffer now more than we can imagine. At all events,

they cannot remain unpunished. Nature is a lavish mother, but her demands are inexorable. Believe me, the consequences of their crime will fall sooner or later upon these women. But why trouble ourselves about it? It is with the present and Cordelia that we have to deal. The torture of her enemies can avail her nothing. She is not of those who take pleasure in the just misfortune of people who have wronged them. She is above that."

The Professor did not reply, and Lamont continued gently. "I must not detain you longer," he said. "She is waiting for you. Tell her, in addition to the message I have already given you, that I think of leaving New York soon. I can no longer work here, for a feeling of unrest troubles me constantly; and it will be better in many ways for me to go elsewhere." He ceased speaking; and the Professor, moved by a sudden impulse, clasped his hand in a friendly grasp.

"I think I understand," he said; "and, if I mistake not, you, too, are deserving of sympathy. But as you have been heretofore, so you will be always, upright and honest."

"Thank you," said the other simply. "Pray tell her,—but never mind: you will do all that is right, I know. Good-by. Keep her with you as long as you can."

He wrung his companion's hand, and turned away; while a sudden dimness came into the Professor's eyes as he saw him disappear in the crowd. The indefinable sense of melancholy underlying Lamont's words affected him profoundly, and made the look of composure with which he approached Cordelia seem forced and unnatural.

The court-room was by this time almost entirely deserted; for the people had gradually been pouring from it in masses, talking in loud voices now of the trial and the verdict. Cordelia, leaning on the Professor's arm, saw Lamont's tall form as he passed through the door and into the street, where the sunlight fell in oblique rays.

"It is all over," she said ; "and I am glad. I suspected the end long ago, and was prepared for it."

But, in spite of the self-control she exercised, hot tears rose to her eyes ; and she hastily drew her veil across her face, that the Professor should not see her weakness. His penetration, however, was greater than she thought.

"She weeps, poor girl," said the Professor to himself, with a sigh. "But it is not the verdict that brings the tears."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

DISAGREEABLE TRUTHS.

“The lady doth protest too much, methinks.”

THE intense joy which Mrs. Fielding and Margaret experienced when the verdict was pronounced in their favor was not greater, by any means, than that which filled the heart of the Superior. Long and fervently did she thank God that at last the money for which the Church had so patiently waited was to be confided to her keeping, and the thought of the personal benefit she was to derive therefrom increased her enthusiasm. Before retiring on the night following the end of the trial, she had fully decided what her plans should be. Cordelia, it is true, had not treated her well in keeping the fact of the recovery of her aunt and the fortune a secret; but this should be forgotten now in consideration of the magnificent results which finally were forthcoming. It was perfectly plain to the Superior, that all thought of the new order and the poverty of the convent had faded completely from Cordelia's mind. This was unfortunate: but she did not doubt that a few earnest entreaties, and a little zealous enterprise, would succeed in recalling the lost sheep again to the fold; and the Superior was not the one to shrink from the undertaking, unpleasant though it might be. Many and sincere were her self-gratulations upon the victory she had gained for her friends. Never before had the intentions of Providence

working through humanity been so apparent to her ; and, with a full sense of the important service she had rendered to the Deity, she surveyed herself from afar, as it were, and marvelled at her own excellence.

No time was to be lost, she felt, in putting her projects into execution ; so, a couple of days after the close of the trial, she set out for Silverbridge ; her hard face wearing an unusually calm expression, the outcome, possibly, of her firm consciousness of bringing the responsibility that rested upon her to a fitting termination.

Half way up the broad walk leading to Mrs. Fielding's house she encountered Margaret, who carried a large hat in one hand, and a bunch of freshly gathered roses in the other. Miss Aldergrove's countenance showed some surprise as she recognized her visitor ; but she advanced politely to meet the Superior, who came forward with outstretched hands.

"My dear child," she said, in a low tone full of feeling, "I have had no opportunity until now to offer my congratulations. We have been more fortunate than I could have supposed. But God is ever watchful, and looks well after the interests of those who serve him faithfully. It was I, Cordelia, whom he chose to employ in this instance as a means of bringing to pass what had previously been ordained ; and I felt the greatness of the task imposed upon me, together with the influence of His blessed will. Had I been at the uttermost end of the globe, gladly would I have come to serve you. Ever since we parted, my one desire has been to find you, and to aid you, if possible, in your noble undertaking. But," continued the Superior, changing her tone from intense pathos to something akin to irritability, "I must say, I never conceived your keeping the fact of your success hidden from me. You may recollect, that one day, soon after you heard of the money, we had a long conversation relative to your plans ; and then

you were very emphatic in regard to what you intended to do with your fortune. The girl, your cousin, whom I was induced by that false priest to believe was you, must have become acquainted with your intentions; for, after she came to the convent, she, doubtless with the view of deceiving me, expressed similar purposes, and even pretended to be a member of our Holy Church. Was ever woman before guilty of such blasphemy? The horrid impostor and heretic! But you, my dear child, have not been altogether blameless; for instead of recalling the hopes formerly entertained, of helping our Holy Church, and the sentiments of duty which were once your whole life, you have evidently forgotten that such things ever existed. Only now, when the envy of your cousin has almost succeeded in wresting from you all that you have so hardly earned, do you call upon me for assistance, — upon me whom you have so thanklessly overlooked, both as a friend and as a representative of the Church you once professed to love. Was this just, Cordelia? Is it what I ought to expect from you?"

The Superior's tone had become tender again, and she sought to infuse a little gentleness into her glance. Margaret, who had listened quietly to her words without attempting any interruption, turned, and regarded her with a half-smile. "What a wonderful memory you have, mother!" she said carelessly. "Since I left Santa Fe, many things have occurred to drive from my mind my girlish hopes and dreams. With you, of course, it is different. Living within those dismal walls, through which no sound from the outer world is allowed to penetrate, how can you do otherwise than brood over fancies which time has killed long ago? With us each day creates ideas, permits them to exist for a few brief hours, and then buries them. Were it not so, we should be surrounded, and our growth checked, by pools of stagnant thought. In the world we live; but

you, who pass the greater part of your existence in a convent, appear, when you finally emerge from it, like a piece of moss-covered humanity overgrown with the weeds of a generation that is dead and gone." She stopped and laughed. And then she resumed after a moment's pause, while the Superior's face assumed an expression of horror, "My aunt's marriage to a Protestant led me to study the subject. I found that I was a Roman Catholic only because I had been brought up in that faith. So soon as I began to reason on the matter, I found I had been believing in a mass of horrible superstitions ; so I became a Protestant, as also did my aunt. You see, then, how impossible it is for me to go back to the old way of thought, or to attempt to carry out the old ideas. My conscience revolts at the very mention of such a thing."

The Superior, whose face had not lost its horrified expression, now drew her tall form up to its fullest extent. "You a Protestant !" she burst forth, her voice trembling with excitement and anger. "A Héricourt a renegade to the faith of her ancestors ! It is impossible ! It is easier for me to believe you to be Margaret Aldergrove than a heretic ! My God, if I should have made a mistake ! if you should, after all, be Margaret Aldergrove the impostor !" She got no farther, but stood wringing her hands convulsively ; while her long black gown, following the motion of her body, twisted itself like a snake about her feet.

"You know, mother," Margaret continued in a low tone, not apparently noticing the Superior's language, "that you have no claim upon me whatever. I believe I did intend at one time to found an order with the money I had inherited ; but, if so, the will has long ago disappeared. My aunt never meant to part with her share in so absurd a manner, I can assure you ; and I can only attribute my own rash promises to youth and inexperience. I have other uses for my wealth than you suppose."

The Superior's rage resolved itself in a burst of passionate tears.

"Oh!" she cried, "can you have forgotten so utterly, Cordelia? Do you no longer remember the pleasure, the impatience, with which you looked forward to helping the Church? How often have we talked it over, with hearts fully alive to the blessed privilege we were thus permitted to enjoy! What has changed you? Is your faith really a thing of the past? Is it possible you have become a heretic?"

She sank down upon a garden-seat near by, and sobbed in an agony of despair and mortification. "Did you not come to me in all your troubles," she resumed in broken tones, "during the time you lived in Santa Fe? Did I not, when you were almost friendless, give you the assistance you needed, coming thousands of miles to your aid?"

"If you wish me to feel a sense of obligation which money can discharge," said Margaret haughtily, "my purse is at your service for any amount which you may consider a fitting equivalent for your care and protection. But more than this I will not do. You cannot surely demand money of me for telling the truth. How much shall it be, mother? At how high a figure do you value your interest and trouble?" She looked defiantly at the Superior, who, stung by the girl's insulting words, sprang to her feet.

"Keep your money! I will not touch it!" she cried, her anger returning tenfold, and a sense of outraged pride overmastering her. "The Church is no beggar, Cordelia Héricourt; and it scorns both you and your wealth. Poor we are, and poor we can remain. But, in thus offending me, you are more than discourteous to the faith you pretended to hold in honor. Your religion, like other things, is dead." Her tall figure swayed back and forth with the

excess of her emotion ; and her eyes rested piercingly upon Margaret, who was calm and collected.

“I will not prolong the discussion,” she said, turning aside. “I have told you what I am willing to do ; and you can accept or refuse the proposition, as you see fit.”

The Superior, whose gaze had been attentively fixed upon Margaret, started suddenly back with a cry of horror.

“Ah !” she said hoarsely. “Now—now I see it all. You are not Cordelia Héricourt. You are Margaret Aldergrove—a heretic—an impostor ! Oh ! what have I done ? What have I done ?” She appeared beside herself with rage and disappointment. “Can it be possible,” she continued, approaching Margaret, and seizing her by the wrist,—“can it be possible that I have really upheld Margaret Aldergrove instead of Cordelia Héricourt ? Answer me at once, or I will go and denounce you.” Her breath came thick and fast, while her fingers tightened upon Margaret’s wrist until the girl winced with pain.

“Let me go ! What right have you to touch me ?” exclaimed Margaret, her face turning pale with anger. “Why do you ask me now who I am ? You know me well enough. Would you have given your evidence in my favor if you had not been sure of my identity ? I shall not stoop to declare to you that I am Cordelia Héricourt. You ought to know my name. But listen to me, Mother Teresa. We have prolonged this conversation quite long enough ; and I, for one, am tired of it. I have no desire to attract the attention of the servants by a theatrical scene here in the garden. So, if you will excuse me, I will return to the house. Good-morning.”

She bowed with a haughty grace, that struck the Superior as might a swift, cold blast sweeping across the lawn. Then she turned away, and in another instant had disappeared within the doorway.

Mother Teresa stood motionless, with heaving chest,

and wide-opened, horror-stricken eyes. For the moment she doubted whether she lived, or floated, like a restless phantom, in a region peopled with terrible dreams. Through her heated brain rang tones that shouted in a wild, triumphant chorus, and made the singing of the birds close at hand seem like a faint echo in the distance. "Not Cordelia Héricourt! not Cordelia!" screamed the voices, in wild, discordant tones. And then, among them, a mocking laugh rose, and vibrated through the air with shrill, unmelodious clamor. The Superior closed her eyes, and thought to see, afar off, the convent-walls, outlined against the blue New-Mexican sky, crumble suddenly away with a deafening crash, and, from the dusty ruins, the pale spirit of the real Cordelia rise to confront her sorrowfully. Oh! whither had flown the wisdom and penetration of former years? Where was the divine protection hitherto so marked? Was the justice of Heaven like a mist that a single shaft of light could dispel, and scatter abroad in watery particles? Not Cordelia Héricourt! And she, the Superior, had striven her utmost to crush the wronged, and elevate the vicious, — she, whose whole life had been intended as a sacrifice to virtue, and devoted to the highest human motives. It was pitiful, indeed, this sharp awakening from unconscious slumber. She wondered that the sun could shine calmly upon the face of so terrible a calamity. She marvelled that she could look about her, and see a smiling, golden universe instead of a void whose eternal night no resplendent gleam could illumine.

The Superior gazed mechanically at the objects which surrounded her, and then placed her trembling hands before her eyes. The tears had already dried upon her white cheeks; and in the look of disappointment and confusion on her face, was something terribly pathetic. The harshness of her features, the inflexible will which had

shone through all her varying shades of expression, and the rigid lines formed by her many passionate moments, had become softened and relaxed as if by magic. This woman, who now stood and faced a reality more frightful than any she had ever known, was no longer the Superior of old, whose womanly personality had been hidden from sight by a cold and severe discipline. Her whole nature had suddenly become revolutionized, as it were, and endowed with new thoughts, sentiments, and capacity. A short time ago childhood had seemed very remote ; but now it came back to her, transformed all at once into a mild beauty, and, clinging to her skirts, looked up at her with blue, expectant eyes dimmed with tears. Something like a sob rose to the Superior's throat, and she felt her limbs give way with the excess of her emotion. Her clasped hands fell nerveless to her side ; and, sinking once more upon the garden-seat, she abandoned herself to such weeping as she had not known for many a year.

It is thus that our helplessness often overcomes us, and teaches us by a bitter experience how insignificant a thing is the strongest human nature. In vain do we delude ourselves into confidence in our own force. Our giant achievements are overthrown by the voice of a child ; our enthusiasm turned aside with the advent of another day ; our capabilities shattered by an unforeseen circumstance. Then it is that we are made conscious of our weakness, and perhaps no pain is more bitter than this knowledge.

It was all very terrible to the Superior. She had lived so long by her own strength, that it was almost more than she could bear now to see it fade away as naught. And yet, of how great a value was this experience in teaching her the smallness of self, — that wonderful lesson which, sooner or later, we are all called upon to learn !

By and by her grief expended itself ; and, with a long-drawn sigh, she rose, gathering up the dusty folds of her

black gown, and advanced toward the high iron gate, which opened upon the road. But, at its entrance, she stopped abruptly, and fell back with a little cry; for another figure, strikingly like Margaret's, was there, and on the point of coming forward. Like Margaret's indeed! and yet the Superior, whose mind was still illumined by the glow which remained from her recent interview, felt some irresistible force thrill her with a vague hope and sorrow combined. Cordelia, with her hand upon the gate, started at the sight of the Superior, whose eyes, inflamed with weeping, gazed at her imploringly. Something in the glance moved the girl with a keen pity. She approached the trembling form with both hands outstretched; and, with a sob, the Superior clung to them, weeping now from very tenderness.

"Cordelia — Cordelia — forgive," she said brokenly, her tears falling upon the girl's hands.

"You know me now, mother," said Cordelia sadly, — "now, when it is too late."

"I have been both blind and wicked. I have wrought irreparable injury upon you," sobbed the Superior. "Can you forgive me, Cordelia, — unworthy servant that I am, blinded by my own selfishness?"

"Nay, mother," said Cordelia gently, surprised at this tone, and the Superior's changed manner. "You have done me no wrong intentionally. In identifying Margaret as me, you meant to do me no injury; for you thought you spoke the truth. Besides" —

"Yes," said the Superior, raising her head, and meeting Cordelia's eyes, "I did think I spoke the truth; but I was guided more by the expectation of the reward to come, than by any strict sense of justice. I thought of the money rather than of you, Cordelia. I believed without inquiry, or examination, what those wicked women told me. But I will undo the wrong. I will go at once to the

judge, and tell him how grievously I have been mistaken. I will not spare myself, and all will yet be right."

"No, no, mother: you must not do that," interposed Cordelia. "I have fought my earthly battle, and have lost; and nothing would tempt me to renew the contest. Let them keep the money and the name, which the law has decided is theirs. It will be good discipline for me to think it over from time to time. It will help to show me the difference between the justice of man and that of God. The matter is in His hands, and He will do what seems good in His sight."

"Ah, Cordelia!" said the Superior, "for me, at least, there has been a lesson to learn; and to-day the first page has been engraved upon my memory. And you, whose noble nature I am yet hardly fitted to comprehend, can teach me still more. The money we shall always look back upon with regret; but, since it is removed irrevocably from us, let us try to give the Church something that will take its place. The order, indeed, cannot be instituted; nor can the convent be materially benefited. But we can work in some other way, surely. Come with me to Santa Fe, Cordelia, and let us begin to instruct the poor girls whom you once hoped to educate in a different manner. If we are unable to accomplish all that we desire, we can, nevertheless, do much."

"That is said generously, mother," replied Cordelia; "and I am glad to hear you make this proposition, for I decided long ago to return to Santa Fe in case I lost this suit against my cousins. I long for the old life, which, in some respects, will be a new one. But," she added, after a pause, "we can speak of this at some other time. Tell me what you are doing here in Mrs. Fielding's garden. Have you seen Margaret?"

"I thought to see you, Cordelia; but not many words had passed between your cousin and me before I discov-

ered my mistake. I have done you a great injustice," said the Superior mournfully. "I fancied you had purposely withheld the money from the Church. Such baseness as those women have been guilty of never entered my mind. Margaret was right, perhaps, when she said I lived in a generation long ago dead and buried. My worldly knowledge, I see, is not great."

"You were not to blame, mother, believe me," said Cordelia. "But I must leave you now, for I have come on an important errand. Let me, however, see you to-morrow if possible."

"Why have you come here?" asked the Superior. "Of what use will it be to speak to your cousins? Can it give you back that which is lost?"

"No, that it cannot do. But I must speak, nevertheless, to Margaret," said Cordelia firmly. "I came away this morning without the Professor's knowledge, but I desire only to say a few words to my cousin."

"Oh!" cried the Superior, with a sudden wail of grief, that recalled to Cordelia's mind another period of her life, "to think, that, having striven so long to help you to secure this fortune, I should finally be the means of your losing it. How can I atone to you for this? How can I ever cease to upbraid myself?"

"You must not think of it in that way, mother. I know that you intended no wrong to me; and perhaps it is as well, after all, that things have ended in this manner. I have not had a happy life. One more disappointment, what is it?"

She spoke a little bitterly, and the Superior looked at her inquiringly.

"You will tell me all, will you not, Cordelia?" she asked softly.

"Yes, all, mother. But let me go now, for I do not wish them to see us talking here."

The two women embraced each other silently ; and presently the Superior passed through the iron gate into the road, while Cordelia walked toward the house. The Superior stood watching her until she had been admitted ; and, as the heavy doors opened and closed again upon the girl's erect form, Mother Teresa's sad eyes filled once more with tears.

CHAPTER XL.

MARGARET SEES GHOSTS.

“ ‘Thy lot, or portion of life,’ said the Caliph Ali, ‘is seeking after thee: therefore be at rest from seeking after it.’ ”

MARGARET, when she had parted from the Superior in the garden, entered the large drawing-room, and began, with steady hands, to arrange the roses in a vase of Japanese porcelain. But, though her slender white fingers did not tremble, there was a strange sensation in her heart; and her cheeks were a shade paler than when she had first gone forth from the house that morning. With her recent victory had come marvellous composure and strength. The long years of striving, of forced serenity, of uncertainty and fear, now seemed to her, in the presence of her triumph, almost as naught. She even smiled on looking back upon the last significant period of her life. Yet the smile contained some bitterness and a little uneasiness, not the result of any feeling of insecurity in regard to her position, real or fancied, but owing to a shadow of fear which had been ever present since Castaly and the Professor had boldly denounced her. Day and night, whether sleeping or waking, Cordelia seemed to stand before her; and in the sad, plaintive eyes of her cousin, Margaret thought to see a restless spirit which refused to slumber. How long, she wondered, would this ghost of a buried crime haunt her? Would her conscience never cease to cry out in

fiery anguish, and would her existence be forever marred by the absence of all human sympathy? Even now, as she arranged the roses in her drawing-room, the Superior's words of sorrow and anger yet rang in her ears, mingled with Cordelia's voice, — a harsh, relentless tone, it is true, but imbued as well with indefinable compassion. Bold as Margaret was, she shrank from the sound and the stern vision which grew momentarily more distinct and awful. She closed her eyes, letting the spray of crimson blossoms she held in her hand fall to the floor. Quaint shadows danced merrily over the polished parquet, cast there by the swaying branches of the trees without; and the sun touched with his golden fingers every object within his reach. At that very moment he was flinging fanciful specks of radiance on the Superior's black robe, which wound in snake-like folds about her feet as she stood motionless and dumb upon the garden-path. But Margaret's mind was filled now with something else. Her thoughts had travelled swiftly to by-gone years. She was wondering what her life would have been had she never met her cousins, the Héricourts. Would the longing for wealth, together with an intense worldly ambition, have possessed her then, so that her whole nature was but a barren soil with a single oasis whereon flourished rank and poisonous weeds that choked her very life? Her entire personality had been contained in one intense longing, and now that longing was satisfied. But it was the old story of the child chasing the butterfly across a summer field.

Are needs aught but fancies? What can we require, since we are here but for a few short years, spent happily only in ignorance? That which yesterday was a necessity becomes to-day something to be cast aside as worthless. And in this way we live, grasping now, that we may fling away to-morrow. Yet, strange delusion, we speak of needs!

Thus Margaret, sitting silent and alone by the drawing-room window, thought of the past, and wondered for what she could next strive. Wealth she had in plenty: her triumph over her cousin had been complete, and the recent deception practised upon the Superior left nothing to be desired. What would be her next step? Could she seek friendship or sympathy? The mere idea caused her to smile, for she knew such things as these had no place in her existence. Alone she had been hitherto, and alone she would remain forever. And yet, her heart cried out in fear and trembling at being forced to meet the vision that was always before it, — the vision of Cordelia Héricourt. It was not remorse that Margaret felt. She regretted nothing that she had done; but a nameless terror haunted her, and was with her always, like a double shadow.

Did the Superior really suspect the fraud which had been practised upon her, or had she uttered words born only of the anger she felt at losing the money? Would she really retract her evidence? No, that was impossible. To do so would cause a scandal, and no good Catholic ever does that. She might threaten in private, but she would never publicly admit that she had made a mistake. Still, she felt afraid. What if old Miss Héricourt should come back? There was scarcely a possibility of that. Still, it was possible; and, at one time during the trial, she dared not raise her eyes, fearful that they might rest upon the form of the long-absent woman stalking up to the witness-stand. The chances were a thousand to one that she was dead.

In the midst of her meditations the door was gently opened, and Mrs. Fielding entered. She had come to speak of the future; and Margaret was not sorry to have her revery broken in upon by her mother, for her thoughts were not pleasant companions. She was ready, in fact, to enter into any discussion that would remove that sad,

implacable image from her mind; so now she rose, and received her mother with an inquiring glance.

"I saw you talking in the garden with Mother Teresa," said Mrs. Fielding listlessly. "What did she want?"

"Want! why, money, of course," said Margaret calmly.

"You mean, she desired payment for her services?"

"No, not exactly. Have you forgotten that Cordelia promised that man Lamont to found an order with her fortune? It seems, too, that she intended to endow the convent. Mother Teresa has a good memory, and came to remind me of all this."

"But you did not, surely," — began Mrs. Fielding in some agitation.

"No, no," said Margaret, smiling at her mother's alarm. "I told the good woman plainly that my intentions, so far as she and the Church were concerned, were a thing of the past. She wept, and called me all manner of names; but I was firm. I never realized before how intensely mercenary Christianity can be."

"It is perfectly ridiculous, — her claim, I mean," said Mrs. Fielding grimly. "It is astonishing, that, when one has a little money, how many there are to spring forth to grasp it if possible. Money, my dear Margaret, that has been acquired by labor, and prized principally on this account, is not to be given into the hands of dissolute priests and nuns, whose habits are really a reproach to their religion. The Superior, I admit, has been of service to us, and should be paid for her trouble, I suppose; but that is quite another matter."

"I offered to reward her," said Margaret; "but she seemed to consider my words an insult. I have seldom seen such fury as hers."

"Indeed!" said Mrs. Fielding coldly. "I cannot say that I am surprised to hear this; nor would it astonish me were she to come back, and gladly accept any thing we

might choose to give her. We are not rid of her yet, I am sure."

"I care very little," replied Margaret. "So far as I am concerned, she may come as often as she pleases. But I do not think we shall ever see her again." She stopped, and glanced cautiously about the room. "The fact is," she continued finally, in a lower tone, "Mother Teresa recognized me, or pretended, in her rage, to do so. I feared a terrible scene, and hastened into the house. It has given me quite a shock. Besides"—

"Besides what, Margaret?"

"You know," said Margaret, in a whisper, "*she* is always here,—always before me with her gray, reproachful eyes looking into mine. Do you, too, see her, mother?"

"No," said Mrs. Fielding, with some asperity. "I have, thank God! none of the absurd fancies which have of late possessed you."

"I cannot help it," replied Margaret mechanically. "Do you think it gives me pleasure to see her form start forth from every nook and corner, and her sad white face follow me day and night? Sometimes I am inclined to fall upon my knees, and beg mercy of this malevolent spirit." Her voice trembled as she spoke, and she glanced from side to side uneasily.

"What absurdity!" said Mrs. Fielding. "Why do you not try to banish it forever, instead of brooding over it? For my part, I have other things than this upon my mind. I wish, to begin with, to talk to you about Castaly and Richard. You can understand, that, after the part played by the girl in the trial, my house is no longer a welcome or fitting abode for her. She leaves it to-day for boarding-school, by her own request and my ready consent. Richard likewise shall go from home. I cannot endure the boy. His presence has become intolerable."

"It will be a great relief to have them away from here,"

said Margaret, recovering herself somewhat. "I, too, have always disliked them ; and my aversion to Castaly in particular increases daily. She is more terrible to me, I think, than Cordelia."

Mrs. Fielding nodded abstractedly, and drew near to the window, which looked out upon the broad garden-path.

"I see a figure dressed in black passing through the gate into the road," she said. "Can it be Mother Teresa? Why should she have staid here so long, I wonder."

"She was doubtless reflecting upon her position," said Margaret carelessly. "But are you sure it was she?"

"It must have been she," said Mrs. Fielding. "No one else could have gone out. And some one must have entered the place also ; for I hear a step on the veranda, — a woman's step."

Margaret started up, her face growing paler.

"A woman's step!" she repeated. "Do you think — could it be — Cordelia?" A great change had come over her suddenly ; and then, as she heard the heavy doors without open and close again, she trembled violently, and approached Mrs. Fielding, who seized her hand.

"Margaret, compose yourself, I entreat you," whispered the older woman. "If it should be Cordelia, she must find us firm, and prepared to meet her unflinchingly."

But, even as she spoke, her own features underwent a marked alteration, and her tone was unsteady. Margaret strove violently to command herself, and turned boldly to face the door, which, at that very instant, opened to admit Cordelia.

In the mean while the sky had become overcast by dark, threatening clouds ; and the dull roll of thunder was heard in the distance. The trees swayed with a swift, rhythmical motion, as angry gusts of wind swept the lawn ; and the lake, lying beyond Castaly's rose-covered pavilion, upon whose liquid sapphire, a moment before, warm sunbeams

had sparkled and danced, was now a sombre expanse, its uprising ripples reflecting the melancholy color of the sky. Nature had harmonized itself seemingly with the Superior's wild grief, and, apprehending the scene which was to follow, moaned and wailed in anger and despair.

Cordelia closed the door gently, and then advanced until she stood within a few feet of the two women, who clung to each other's hands in silence and consternation.

Upon her highly strung senses the subdued light of the apartment, and the sound of the rising storm, fell like a calm influence, unrecognized though keenly felt. Now, indeed, could striking differences be detected between the two girls, as they stood thus face to face. The pallor of the one, her half-closed, yet defiant eyes, her compressed and resolute lips, were in strong contrast to the other's features, overshadowed as they were by hopeless weariness.

It was Margaret who first spoke.

"What do you want here?" she demanded haughtily, notwithstanding her fear. "Have you come to claim that which is now ours forever?"

Her chest heaved with agitation, but her head was thrown proudly back.

"No," said Cordelia sadly. "That would be useless, I fear, Margaret. Your strength has conquered my weakness, and so I shall let the matter rest as it is. I no longer claim that which is mine, and which you have stolen from me: nor will I reproach you; for I know how little impression my anger would make upon you, and of what slight avail it would be to me. But I look at you both in wonder. You call yourself human,—and I have never done you wrong. Why, then, have you been so cruel, so merciless, so unsparing? For what reason have you wrecked my life, and committed another crime, which I shudder even to name? Have I ever harmed you?"

A dull red color rose to Margaret's cheeks, and she dropped her head.

"You did harm us," she said. "You were rich, and had never known want. We were poor, and likely to remain so always. It maddened me."

"For you, Cordelia, for you personally," said Mrs. Fielding, "we had no great ill-feeling. Could the money have been ours without the necessity of doing you an injury, God knows we should have been spared many terrible hours."

"I believe you," said Cordelia coldly; "and I marvel the more at your endurance, your perseverance. You have deprived me of all that was to compose my life's happiness. I do not speak merely of the money, but of other things which you will never know. You have been blind to my suffering, and deaf to the voice of justice. You have left no stone unturned that you might rejoice over my helplessness. I would know what you are, for women you cannot be."

There was a subdued passion in her tone, and she drew a step nearer her cousins.

"I have said it would be useless to reproach you," she continued more calmly. "And, indeed, my sorrow, and the bitter experience you have forced upon me, may some day give me cause to thank you as being the forerunners of a better life than the one I have led. But at this moment I am perplexed and uncertain. I have questions to put which my lips hardly know how to frame. Why have you been so heartless? If I did not always treat you with affection, I gave you honesty and hospitality. And, in order to insure your own worldly prosperity, you have wrought misery upon me, and degraded yourselves to the lowest possible level. Had you asked me for money, would I have refused it, do you think? Had you boldly taken it, I might, perhaps, have pardoned the act, knowing well

the deeds which poverty sometimes occasions. But that you should personate me, rob me by stealth, live a life of deception, and even commit murder" —

"Murder! No, no!" exclaimed Margaret, white with terror. "There was never a thought of murder in our hearts." Her forced composure gave way all at once, and she sank on her knees before her cousin.

"O Cordelia, if you only knew how much we have endured!" she cried in broken accents. "If I have been treacherous and criminal to you, all that I have gained has been most dearly bought. My whole life is a torment to me; for your reproaches sound continually in my ears, and I see your face day and night. There is no rest for me, — none — none. But yet, I cannot give back that which is yours. I cannot return your money. It is the one thing that binds me to existence. But if you are in want, — if you have no means" —

"Yes," interrupted Mrs. Fielding faintly. "If you will leave us, Cordelia, if you will only spare us the consciousness of your presence, we will gladly give you any sum you may desire. Indeed," she added doubtfully, "we might even, under certain conditions, be willing to return you the whole amount of your inheritance. We have a great deal more than that now."

"What!" cried Cordelia, her anger bursting suddenly forth into an almost ungovernable fury. "Will you, in addition to all you have already done, insult me now with your charity, and speak of 'conditions' for giving me my own, — charity paid for with my own money which you have stolen from me?" Her eyes flashed with excitement, and she trembled from head to foot.

"Get up," she said contemptuously to Margaret, "get up, and be thankful that I have treated you so leniently. You offer me charity with my own money. This is indeed the acme of assurance. But you are glad, I can see, that

I refuse your generosity, Margaret. It would doubtless cost you a severe struggle to part with even a small part of your ill-gotten gains. Oh!" she cried with sudden vehemence, "each day that I have lived has brought to me the knowledge of some fresh human weakness or depravity. But my contempt and my disgust have never been so strong as they are now. You would buy my silence. You would seek, by giving me a few paltry dollars, to lift from your consciences the load of crime which is slowly crushing them. But not if you gave back every penny that is mine, could you find the rest you crave. More than this is required to tranquillize your minds, and free them from self-reproach. No, no; keep my money by all means. But, believe me, I would not exchange it for your inhumanity."

Margaret had risen to her feet, pale and awe-stricken, and stood listening to her cousin's fierce anger with some of her old defiance.

"Then, why are you here, since you desire nothing from us?" she asked with difficulty. "It is enough for us to see you always in imagination. Spare us your actual presence, I beg of you."

As she spoke, a peal of thunder crashed without, and the storm burst in all its fury. The rain, falling in torrents, was tossed by the riotous wind into glittering spray, some of which struck the window-panes, and trickled down therefrom in bright, fantastic curves. The shrubs and trees swayed in the fitful gusts; and from the drooping willows, whose branches dipped into the lake, a sighing cadence seemed to emanate.

The noise of the tempest increased Margaret's nervousness, and Mrs. Fielding shivered in nameless terror.

"We never meant to harm you," she murmured almost inaudibly. "It was the money — only the money."

"And my aunt, what of her?" demanded Cordelia,

drawing herself up with a gesture of supreme contempt. "Have you ever thought of her, abandoned and helpless upon the plains? Can any amount of money bring to you oblivion of this crime? Can it cease to haunt you so long as you are permitted to live? You are yet young, Margaret. Many years, doubtless, are before you. You have every material source of happiness. But who would change places with you? No punishment I could inflict would equal in severity the inevitable punishment in store for you, which has perhaps begun already."

Her voice was now melancholy rather than harsh, and the angry light had faded from her eyes. Her cousin's position seemed to her so pitiable, that the sense of her own misfortune was for the moment forgotten. She glanced mechanically about the luxurious apartment, which even the storm raging without could hardly render less brilliant. Now and then a gleam of vivid lightning, flashing into the room, illuminated the pale, stately marbles, the painted porcelains, and the gorgeous Oriental stuffs with which the furniture was covered. The large crystal chandelier hanging from the ceiling caught in its white, glittering pendants fiery colors of purple, orange, and green. But, in the centre of the floor, the rose dropped by Margaret formed a crimson spot on the shining parquet, like the stain of blood.

Margaret saw it, and shivered as if with cold.

"How long will you torture us with your presence?" she asked. "Do you not see that we suffer terribly?"

"You will be called upon to suffer still more, believe me," said Cordelia wearily. "I do not know why it is that I fail to upbraid and even curse you. For to wreck a life as you have wrecked mine is not an account to be settled lightly. And yet, I pity you. The lowest wretch in the streets of New York seems an enviable person in comparison with you. But I will leave you to your own

consciences if they be not dead. I have no more to say. May God bring you to see in its true light the evil you have done, and forgive you as freely as I do now!"

"You may go," cried Margaret, with a wail of anguish that caused a thrill to pass through Cordelia's heart, — "you may go; but no, no, you will never leave me. Though you are thousands of miles away, I shall still see your face as I see it now, as I have seen it sleeping and waking for many months. Why do you not curse me? Why do you not call down the vengeance of Heaven upon me? Then I would curse back and defy you, but your forgiveness maddens me."

"You are in God's hands," said Cordelia. She left the room, closing the door softly behind her; while Margaret, covering her face with her hands, sank upon the floor; and Mrs. Aldergrove, apparently stupefied with terror, stood motionless as though turned to stone.

As Cordelia stepped upon the veranda, she saw the rain was over, and that a delicate green haze tinged the atmosphere, and fell on every object like a gossamer web. The foliage in the garden sank under its weight of crystal drops; and some scarlet geraniums, torn from their stems by the impetuous blast, lay strewn upon the wet grass. Then, a moment later, the sun burst through the sky, scattering with his golden shafts the sad, cheerless clouds before him, until they vanished in pearly mist, leaving in their stead a vast expanse of blue heaven flecked with white.

Cordelia passed down the garden-path, and thought of the Superior, and then of Margaret. She had treated her cousins almost with kindness. But was it not better so? Would hard words have made them as sensible of their dishonor as had her contempt and pity? Besides, the weariness of her life, her intense disappointment, had taken from her much strength, leaving her an unbounded

capacity for endurance, and but little force to combat against misfortune.

In the journey back to the Professor's house, she recalled again the Superior's words, and sighed. Would it not be advisable to return to Santa Fe as suggested, and begin life anew? Wealth was lost: her position was always insecure, and love was a thing that could never be hers. A great restless longing rose in her heart. Where indeed could she find the rest she needed if not in that quaint New-Mexican city, and among the people whom it had been her one ambition to improve? She could work there, in a limited way it is true, but none the less sincerely; and she would find in her occupation a freedom from all painful association. Her mind, as she thought, was almost made up; and she saw herself again in fancy, sitting in the rough *adobe* cathedral among the vague, flickering shadows, while old, familiar, and well-beloved tones fell upon her ear. It was Lamont's voice that she heard; and yet she well knew, that, in going back to Santa Fe, she should never look upon his face again.

CHAPTER XLI.

DAYBREAK.

“Lo ! with a little rod
I did but touch the honey of romance,
And must I lose a soul’s inheritance? ”

CORDELIA saw the Superior on the following day, and the two women talked together long and earnestly. Mother Teresa was very mild, very humble ; and her affection for Cordelia seemed genuine, touched, as it was, by a shade of remorse. It was impossible not to be sensible of the change that had taken place in the Superior, and it did much toward consoling Cordelia for all she had lost. To enter upon her new work side by side with one whose rough-edged, unpolished character had been somewhat refined by disappointment, seemed to rob her future life of much anticipated hardship.

They spoke freely of the past, of the convent, and the bishop, who still remained in Santa Fe, living in a cheerless fashion among the people whom he had grown to love, notwithstanding their ignorance, superstition, and brutality. They talked also of the trial, the Aldergroves, and old Miss Héricourt, wondering what fate had overtaken this poor, weak woman, who had been so cruelly dealt with. But one subject remained sealed between them. Of Lamont neither spoke. A dozen times had his name risen to Cordelia’s lips to resolve itself in unbroken si-

lence. She hoped that Mother Teresa would mention him, but she did not. Perhaps the recollection of him whom she still regarded with horror and indignation recalled other things which were no less disagreeable, and so she carefully avoided the subject. It was better, surely, to let this portion of Cordelia's life remain as it was, — a sad memory, only to be called forth when some noble occupation, carried on unselfishly, could render it less painful than it was now.

She spoke to the Professor and his wife, a day or two later, of the arrangements she had made. It was a hard task to do so, for she experienced a bitter pain at the thought of leaving these dear friends. Yet she told them calmly of her desire and intention to return to Santa Fe, and begin to live in a different and better way. For the first time in years she saw a moisture in the Professor's eyes.

They were sitting together in the drawing-room when she broke the truth to them. It was evening; and the curtains were drawn, for autumn was at hand with its chill nightfall. The pale glow from the silver lamp fell upon the dainty figure of little Elfrida, who, with a rose-colored ribbon in her hand, was singing softly to herself. She stopped abruptly when Cordelia made known her resolution to the older people, and approached her governess with a quick, startled glance.

"You are going away?" she asked, in an awe-stricken tone.

"I must, dear," said Cordelia, who thought the child had been too absorbed in her own amusement to hear what had been said. "Shall you miss me, little Elfrida?"

There were tears in her eyes as she put the question; while Elfrida, uttering a cry of dismay, clasped her about the neck with childish passion.

"No, no, — you must not — you shall not go," she said,

sobbing bitterly. Then she ran and buried her face in her mother's lap.

Mrs. Hoveden said nothing, but stroked the child's golden curls soothingly. Her heart was too full for speech; but the Professor turned to Cordelia, and said gravely, —

“Are you sure, dear Miss Héricourt, that you have decided wisely? Have you reflected upon the cold severity of the life you contemplate? Remember, that, although the home you have had with us may not have possessed every requirement for happiness, it has at least given you some comforts which you cannot hope to enjoy in Santa Fe.”

Cordelia flushed a little, for she fancied there was a ring of reproach in his voice.

“You have both been the kindest and dearest of friends to me,” she said with emotion; “and I can never repay the debt of gratitude I owe you. But, after all that has happened, I feel unfitted to remain here. It is duty as well as inclination that calls me away. The world does not attract me, and my heart is buried in the longing to be of service to the Church and humanity.”

She spoke a little sadly: for, in looking at the Professor's face, she saw lines there which a month ago had not existed; and she knew they had been caused by his efforts to serve her.

“Dear Mrs. Hoveden,” she said, “will you not say that I am right? It breaks my heart to leave you, but I have no alternative.”

“You must do as you think best, Cordelia,” replied Mrs. Hoveden. “I cannot advise you in such a matter. But I am sure you will always act as your conscience dictates. Your life has not been happy, I know; and you have endured much that would have crushed a less noble nature. If now, at last, you see a faint semblance of hap-

piness before you, do your utmost, by all means, to make it real. It would be selfish in us, under the circumstances, to bid you remain with us. You know, however, how much sorrow your loss will occasion us."

Tears glistened in her eyes, and her voice trembled. Cordelia was much moved.

"Were it not that I am obliged to go, nothing should make me leave you," she said simply.

Little Elfrida, sobbing in her mother's lap, raised her head; and her great eyes, like wet violets, looked at Cordelia hesitatingly.

"I do not believe you will go. You must not go," she said.

The Professor motioned to Cordelia to humor the child, for he dreaded the effect of her governess's departure upon Elfrida's impressionable and excitable temperament.

"We shall see," answered Cordelia, understanding the glance. "At all events, let us speak of it no more at present."

"You cannot go! I know you will not go!" exclaimed the child. A moment later she had again taken up the scarf of soft rose-colored silk, and, holding it aloft, began to dance back and forth in the mellow lamplight. Cordelia, as she gazed at the small, fantastic figure in its quaint dress, about which the ends of the ribbon fluttered in graceful curves, sighed deeply; for she loved Elfrida. Then her glance wandered to the Professor, who had put his book aside, and sat lost in sad reflection.

A melancholy day it was for them all when Cordelia and the Superior set out on their long and tedious journey. It was November now; and the trees bore the last of the autumn leaves, whose brilliant coloring had been dimmed by the blasts of approaching winter. It was not an agreeable season of the year in which to travel; but Cordelia felt that she had delayed the execution of her

plan too long already, and the Superior desired impatiently to return to the convent.

All the way from New York to Independence, Cordelia saw nothing through her tear-dimmed eyes but the Professor's gloomy countenance, and Mrs. Hoveden's sorrowful, resigned expression. She had gone from the house without bidding Elfrida good-by, for they all feared the shock of losing her governess would seriously injure the child. And so, in Cordelia's recollection of that bitter parting, little Elfrida had no place; and she could recall her as she had seen her first and last, moving gracefully up and down the dimly lighted drawing-room, with the flickering firelight glittering red on the gold embroideries, and throwing grotesque shadows across the sombre walls.

And there were other memories, of a joyless kind, which filled her thoughts, and made her almost unconscious of the varying scenes through which she passed. To fix her mind entirely upon the new life was difficult, while all through which she had lately gone was fresh in her recollection. The irrevocable loss of her fortune, and her cousin's bold triumph, were painful reflections; but her love had been the greatest trial of all. Another nature, one less great than Cordelia's, would have grown bitter under its hopelessness; but in her it served to soften and elevate. Never had her desires of usefulness been so ardent as now. And this did not arise from the pique and wounded vanity which often drive mankind to seclusion and good works in a sort of angry desperation, but was owing solely to her innate nobility and superiority. It was not because she had lost Lamont that she resolved to devote herself hereafter to deeds of charity and benevolence, but because, in losing him, she had become aware of her capability and powers of endurance, which she longed to exercise in a fitting manner.

"I fear you have found me a sorry travelling compan-

ion," she said to the Superior as they approached Independence. "But you can understand the thoughts which fill my mind. It is not that I forget the new life, but that I recall involuntarily the old."

"Yes," said Mother Teresa calmly. "But the knowledge that you will soon be one of us overshadows all else. I am very happy, Cordelia, — more so than I have been for many years ; for I now see clearly."

"You were always good, dear mother. And I know I caused you much pain once. It shall be very different now," said Cordelia.

The Superior glanced keenly at her. She was on the point of mentioning Lamont's name, and asking Cordelia where he was and what he did ; but something in the girl's face caused her to hesitate, and remain silent.

A little later they took the stage-coach for Santa Fe, and Cordelia smiled as the rough dialect of the driver and his assistant fell again upon her ears.

"Surely you are Taylor, — Bill Taylor," she said, addressing the former. "Do you remember me?"

"Why, you're Major Héricourt's daughter, or else t'other one, his niece," said Taylor, his face beaming with pleasure. "I don't exactly know which, but it's one on you I'm certain sure. Glad I am, too, to see you a-goin' to the old place."

"I am Major Héricourt's daughter," said Cordelia ; "and I intend to live again in Santa Fe. Is it much changed?"

"It might be," said Taylor doubtfully. "It might be, miss. The fact is," he added, "I'm so busy a-drivin' this ere stage, year in an' year out, that I don't have much chance to see what's a-goin' on in the town." He drew a long breath, as if he regretted his lost opportunities, and then turned to his assistant.

"I'll just tell you what," he said confidentially, "it does

my heart a heap o' good to see that air young lady again. She's Major Héricourt's daughter; and the Major was true blue, he was. He died like a soldier."

He cracked his whip as he spoke, and the horses dashed forward over the muddy road. The weather was cool and pleasant at first; but, on the eighth day, a change set in. The sky gradually became overcast by gray, leaden clouds, and soon a few flakes of snow began to fall. It was the first time that the presence of winter had made itself apparent, and the air had in it the biting sting of the north wind. When morning dawned, the ground was thinly covered by a glittering coating of white, which grew deeper and deeper until the horses plodded through it with difficulty. Some anxiety was expressed by the passengers in regard to the storm, which, after the usual halt had been made at noon, increased in violence. Through the heavy, dismal atmosphere the whirling flakes were borne along by the howling gusts; and across the desolate prairie naught could be seen but the drifting snow, from which rose, here and there, a bare and stunted shrub.

"Darn me!" said Bill Taylor to his assistant, "it's a-goin' to be a regular buster, an' no mistake. We're not far off from Las Vegas, and we've only a few passengers aboard; but, all the same, it will be no joke if we lose the road. If this goes on much longer, the stage will come to a stop. It can't be dragged along by them horses. Why, the poor critters is a'most dead already."

Toward nightfall Cordelia and the Superior looked out at the dull sky and the blinding snowflakes, which the blast tossed madly and fantastically into white, feathery spray. Higher and yet higher rose the drifts, into which the horses sank up to their knees; while over the prairie came the melancholy howl of the coyote and the shrill moan of the wind.

The Superior, terrified by the intensity of the storm,

and the prospect of being lost on the prairie, sat shivering and silent, with her Hours tightly clasped in her hands; while she tried now and then to murmur a few words of prayer. Cordelia said nothing, but waited patiently for the tempest to abate. She had heard of the stage-coaches being snow-bound; and sometimes the passengers had been kept on the plain until assistance was forthcoming, or death ended their sufferings.

"Surely," she said to Taylor, "they must expect us in Las Vegas. They know when the stage is due. Will they not send out help to us?"

"That they will, miss. But how can they find us on such a night as this? They might scream an' scream, an' so might we; but, with this devilish wind a-makin' such a noise, we couldn't hear each other. And it's as dark as pitch. Besides, I am not sure we're on the road. I've driven by compass all day."

The stage by this time could advance no farther; for the horses were sinking with fatigue, and the banks of drifting snow made farther progress impossible. The passengers sat in gloomy silence, or else loudly expressing their disgust and impatience at being obliged to pass the night thus, with the fierce wind beating against the sides of the stage, and icy particles of snow forcing their way in through the closely drawn curtains.

"They be a-lookin' for us," said Taylor. "But they'll never find us afore to-morrow, and p'raps not then. I've got lots o' lanterns here if we could use 'em."

"Could we not hang them somewhere on the stage?" asked a passenger anxiously.

"In this wind?" inquired Taylor, with some scorn. "Why, bless your heart, sir! they'd be blowed to pieces in half a second. There's no help for it, I'm afraid. I've lost the road: the critters is used up, and here we'll have to stay till mornin', any way."

But, even as he spoke, his quick eye had caught the gleam of something which penetrated the darkness like a golden star. In a moment he had jumped from the stage with a quick cry, and, seizing a lantern, lighted it, and attached it to his whip, which he held aloft. The passengers noted the exclamation and the action. "What is it? What do you see, Taylor?" cried several. "Are they coming for us? Can you make them see us?"

"I saw a light, certain sure," said Taylor, his voice trembling with excitement. "It was not very far off either. Bring more lanterns," he added to his assistant, "and try to keep the wind from blowin' 'em out. And you, gents, can help us if you'll all get out."

The men descended hurriedly from the stage into the snow; and, through the obscurity, they saw, as Taylor had done, a faint yellow glimmer, which presently was followed by others more distinct.

"They are coming to help us," said Mother Teresa, in a tone of relief, dropping her Hours upon her lap. "I do not think I could have borne it much longer. In spite of the buffalo-robies, the cold is intense."

"We shall soon be in Santa Fe," said Cordelia cheerfully. "Help is at hand, and ere long we shall be safely housed within the convent."

She bent forward, and raised a corner of the curtain. The snow was falling less thickly, but the wind still blew like a hurricane across the prairie; and the glow from the lanterns flickered upon the great, uneven drifts, which were piled almost above the wheels of the stage.

"They are coming nearer," she heard one of the passengers say. "I can see the lights quite plainly; and they have seen ours, doubtless. Ugh! how cold it is! I am buried to my waist, and I can hardly hear my voice for the wind."

"Keep them lights a-goin'," said Taylor encouragingly.

"They're a-gettin' on fast, they are; and I should say they'd be here in less than half an hour. Can you hold out that long, gents?"

"That we can!" exclaimed another voice. "The ladies within must be suffering from cold and fright. I would stand here until morning to relieve them."

"Well said!" cried another. "You were always a gallant old fellow. I say, though, how it does blow!"

A half-hour passed, during which Cordelia and the Superior talked together in a low tone; while the men stood bravely without in the gale, and held aloft the lanterns. They could hear at last the voices of those who had come to their aid, and see the outline of a large vehicle. A little later Taylor and his men advanced as well as they could to welcome the arrivals, and the two women sat and waited patiently.

The vivid flash of many lanterns across the snow illuminated the darkness; so that Cordelia, peering into the night with hopeful eyes, could distinguish the forms of a number of men moving toward the stage.

"Can you see any thing?" asked the Superior. "My eyes are too old to reach so far; and, indeed," she added a little plaintively, "they are of no use to me at all without my spectacles."

"I can see some men and another stage, I think," said Cordelia. "The lights are very bright; and just now, as a ray fell upon one of the new-comers, I fancied he wore the dress of a priest."

"Ah!" said the Superior, with some animation, "it must be the lay brothers of the Holy Cross who have come to save us. They are good, pious men, and live a life of devotion and sacrifice."

"I never heard of this brotherhood before," said Cordelia in some surprise. "Has it been recently established here?"

"After you left, I think," said the Superior; and she would have continued had not some one at that moment approached the stage.

"Ladies," said the voice of a passenger, "we are doubly fortunate. Not only has the stage-agent in Las Vegas sent a vehicle, and a driver who can show us the way, but some brothers of a holy order, knowing we were in danger, have left their warm houses on the outskirts of the town, and come on foot, part of the way, in order to help us. By to-morrow, at daybreak, we shall be on our way again; and in the mean time they are making a fire, and getting some coffee ready. I came to suggest your going into the other stage if possible. It is provided with hot-water cans for your feet, and you will be much more comfortable there than here. It is but a few steps off, and we have made a rough path through the snow. Will you come?"

"By all means," said Mother Teresa quickly. "It must be near morning; and, with another buffalo-robe, I think I could sleep soundly. Come, Cordelia. As this gentleman says, we shall be more comfortable."

Her eyes were half closed as she spoke.

"Yes, let us go," said Cordelia. "It no longer snows; and soon, perhaps, the wind will cease also. I am not sleepy, but I am very cold; and the warm stage will be welcome."

The two women descended, with the gentleman's assistance, to the ground; and, even in the path that had been made, the snow rose above their ankles. The night was still very black; but here and there fell a ruddy gleam from the lanterns which the men carried in their hands, while a brighter light streamed from the fire that had been kindled.

Mother Teresa leaned upon the stranger's arm, while Cordelia followed. The other stage was but a few steps

distant ; and, as the Superior entered it, some one called loudly to her companion, who turned away, with an excuse to Cordelia saying he would rejoin her immediately. As he left her, another and taller figure emerged from the gloom, and approached her. It was one of the brothers, as she could plainly see ; for a man passing with a lantern let its rays fall directly upon a masculine form arrayed in a dress of coarse brown serge. The face of the stranger was not observed by Cordelia during that one flash of light ; but the figure drew near, and said gently, —

“Let me help you. You are trying, I see, to reach the other stage. It is almost beside you ; and you will find it, I think, a pleasant exchange from your previous quarters. But is there not another lady with you ? I was told there were two.”

Cordelia did not hear the question : for, at the first tones of his voice coming through the darkness, a deadly faintness seized her ; and she felt about to sink to the ground. The lanterns near by seemed like vague, quivering specks of fire in the distance, and then disappeared entirely. She put forth her hand as if to save herself from falling.

“You are overcome by the cold,” said the same gentle voice. “Lean on my arm, and let me take you to the stage.”

She roused herself by a great effort. She had been dreaming, doubtless, of the rude New-Mexican cathedral, from whose dim shadows a voice such as this had so often come forth. She had been dreaming, too, that the same tones had called her by name, and conversed with her. And then Fancy’s quick, incomprehensible strides had carried her back to the Professor’s drawing-room, where, sitting in the dusky twilight, she and Lamont had fought the severest battle of their lives. Yet this chill and bitter wind, the cold snow lying in frozen whiteness before her, this figure wearing the garb of a holy order, were realities ;

for she felt them to be such. She stretched forth her arms with a little sob.

"Paul," she whispered faintly. "Paul!"

At the sound of the voice and the softly uttered name, he started back with a cry, whether of joy or despair it would be hard to tell. Then he drew her toward him, and clasped her in his arms.

"You — you, Cordelia," he murmured, in a tone that barely reached her ear. He stepped aside to where some of the snow had been cleared away, and the light from the fire did not reach them.

"Why are you here, Cordelia?" he asked, holding her still in his arms, — "here on this snow-bound prairie?" His words seemed to be spoken with difficulty, and she felt tears from his eyes fall upon her cheeks.

"I go back to begin life again," she said slowly, after a pause. "You have done so already," she added simply.

"Let us begin it together," he cried passionately. "Fate has brought you here. She is too strong for us: we cannot escape her. Stay with me now and always, Cordelia. Let us live for each other as well as for our faith." He spoke wildly; and his words, reaching her, as it were, from the wailing storm, pierced her like a sharp knife.

"You wear a holy dress," she said indistinctly; and he made no answer. For a moment both were silent, and no sound was heard save the men's voices veiled by the sighing wind. Then Lamont relaxed his clasp about Cordelia's form, and said in an altered tone, —

"You must not stay here. Let me take you to the stage-coach, where you will find warmth and shelter."

She acquiesced mutely; and they traversed together the short distance which separated them from the stage, that rose up a bulky mass in the obscurity.

There was no one within but a passenger and the Superior, who, both worn out with fatigue, slept soundly. Bill Taylor, with the assistance of some of the men, was trying to extricate his stage from the snow-drift in which it was plunged; while others were busy getting ready something hot to eat and drink.

Cordelia stood by the fire, which was close to the stage, while Lamont threw a woollen rug around her.

"Mother Teresa, of Our Lady of Guadaloupe, is with me," she said, pointing towards the stage. Her voice sounded cold and unnatural.

"Mother Teresa," he said vaguely. "Ah, yes! I remember there were two ladies they said."

She stood so that the light from the fire touched her pale features.

"You are not changed," he said calmly. "Your trouble has made your face more peaceful, that is all."

"And you?" she asked, awed somewhat by his simple words. "Turn your face a little, that I may see you more clearly."

He obeyed, and she saw that his dark eyes had in them a look of patient suffering such as she had never before witnessed. His cheeks were very pale; and his long, loose dress of coarse serge, confined at the waist by a cord, made his erect form look taller than usual. The gown was wet to the knees with melted snow, and now and then he shivered as if with cold. Cordelia, as she gazed at him, felt an unutterable sorrow rise within her. Presently his voice again broke the silence.

"I do not know why you are here with the Superior," he said quietly; "but this is neither the time nor the place to explain it. One thing, however, you can tell me. Have we met to-night, only to part on the morrow? Answer me, Cordelia. Must I give you up again as I have twice done already?"

He seemed hardly conscious of what he said. "What answer can I give you now?" she asked brokenly. "You have entered a holy order, and you wear its emblem. In a few days I shall become an inmate of the convent. We have chosen our lives."

"No, no," he cried, his voice growing stronger. "No, Cordelia, I am bound by no vows, nor are you. The order I have entered I can leave to-morrow if you bid me. It is I now who plead with you, not you with me."

"Have I the right to take you from the holy life you lead? Ought I to renounce the one I intended to enter upon?" she asked sadly.

"We will work together," he cried eagerly. "Does not life owe us both something? Ah, Cordelia! the time is past when I thought it right to consider little things, and let the larger ones slip by me unseen. I did wrong to leave you when you gave me the precious gift of your love, but I am sensible now of my fault. Take me again to your heart and into your life."

He drew near to her, and looked into her face with passionate pleading. In the mean while the night was wearing quietly away; and the wind was dying with low, mournful accents. Many forms, those of the brothers and of Taylor and his men, passed back and forth; but no attention was paid to the two figures, one wearing a sacred garb, who conversed together in the semi-obscurity.

And then, at last, the gray dawn crept slowly up above the horizon, making visible the vast prairie, which stretched on all sides like a great white sea, with foaming billows rising toward the sky.

Lamont's form stood out distinctly in the pale light.

"Life is our debtor, Cordelia," he said again: "we have given much, and now our reward is held out to us. Shall we refuse it? Youth, indeed, I cannot offer you; but my hands hold the autumn fruits of my experience, gathered

when the green leaves of spring and summer are on the decline. Will you take them?

She did not answer. Joy was on her face, and yet over it passed a shadow of indecision. Then she stretched forth her hand, and laid it in his.

So they remained for a while, both conscious of an indefinite feeling of rest and happiness, over which, however, a cloud still hung.

"See," he said finally, raising his head, and pointing to the eastern horizon. "Day is breaking, Cordelia."

She followed his glance, and saw the first delicate crimson streaks which herald the sun's coming. Deeper they grew in color, and then, rising higher, cast a faint rosy reflection across the snowy waste.

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